

## PUBLISHERS' NOTE

THIS book comprises a revised and extended chapter of *The Churches and Modern Thought*. It is quite complete in itself, but necessarily the argument will be better understood if read in conjunction with the chapters which precede and follow it. The complete volume, consisting of 306 pp., is now available, clothette bound, in the Thinker's Library at 1s. net (by post 1s. 3d.). There has recently been published a supplement to the original work, by the same author, which adequately extends the survey and discusses recent developments; this is *Modern Knowledge and Old Beliefs*, which may be had in a cloth-bound library edition at 2s. 6d. net (by post 2s. 9d.), or in paper covers at 1s. net (by post 1s. 2d.).

# CONCERNING PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

BY

VIVIAN PHELIPS

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## PREFACE

OF all the branches of science in which marked progress has been made in recent years, social anthropology is the one of which we have heard the least. No publicity worth the name has been given to its startling disclosures. Yet the facts brought to light by the comparative method concerning the various supernatural religions of the world, past or surviving, are of the greatest interest. They cry aloud for an explanation, and, whatever our individual beliefs or unbeliefs may happen to be, that explanation deeply concerns every one of us. In the case of the Christian religion a new theory, the theory of a Progressive Revelation, has been propounded. If tenable, all the grave suspicions aroused by this fresh knowledge are dispelled, and, in addition, we have a singularly convincing proof of the truth of the Christian creed. If untenable, and no other explana-



tion is offered that could be accepted in these days, our suspicions seem to be confirmed.

Both in *The Churches and Modern Thought* and in its sequel, *Modern Knowledge and Old Beliefs*, I have made an appeal for candour. I appeal again. These questions, so vital to our lives, must be discussed freely and frankly if they are ever to have a fair chance of being settled rightly.

V. P.

*July 1936.*

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## CONCERNING PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

### § I. *The New Theological Theory of a Progressive Revelation.*

THE facts and truths established by Science are no longer made the subject of attacks by Christian apologists in the manner that they used to be; they are now considered by them to be the unfolding, through God's Providence, of pieces of information hitherto concealed from us. A scientific discovery simply means that God wills to reveal another detail of His eternal methods. There must be, we are told, a frank modification, or even the abandonment, of certain preconceived ideas which, faulty as they were, had sufficed for man in an earlier stage of his development, and had come to be regarded as integral parts of his religious faith. This is the substance of the modern apologist's argument which is

intended to reconcile all outstanding discrepancies between our new knowledge and our old beliefs. The new explanation, based upon the assumption that revelation is progressive, will come as a surprise to the rank and file of Christendom, who have hitherto been given to understand that the Bible contained the one, only, and sufficient revelation of God to man. However, there is no alternative. If accepted, many grave difficulties of faith are swept away. Nay, more; the reasonableness of our faith is immensely strengthened, and the facts of science and research become a valuable adjunct to the armour of the Christian apologist. On the other hand, a refusal to accept spells disaster to the Christian faith. The truth of progressive revelation is, therefore, a matter of life or death for the Christian religion; and, of all branches of modern research, it is Comparative Mythology which absolutely demands a thorough examination of this theory. If true, our belief is further verified by the startling discoveries of the anthropologist; if untrue, it is irrevocably shattered.

I think I may safely say that there is no

department of knowledge about which so little is known by the ordinary man, and even, I regret to say, by the majority of ecclesiastics, as Comparative Mythology. Yet it is the study of this science perhaps more than of any other which is causing well-informed men and women to lose faith in Christianity. Ask Christian professors in our universities who are in touch with the thought around them, and you will hear that their sceptical friends are all telling them the same thing; they cannot get over anthropology, and especially that branch of it which concerns itself with the traditions and beliefs of primitive peoples. Recent anthropological research has thrown an entirely new light upon old problems. The discoveries of science, including the animal origin of man, may, by a stretch of imagination and faith, be reconciled with belief; so also the disclosures of the Higher Criticism; but the revelations of Comparative Mythology lay bare the primitive origin of all supernatural beliefs and their rites. "It is indeed a melancholy and in some respects thankless task to strike at the foundations of beliefs in which, as in a strong tower, the hopes and

aspirations of humanity through long ages have sought a refuge from the storm and stress of life. Yet sooner or later it is inevitable that the battery of the comparative method should breach these venerable walls, mantled over with the ivy and mosses and wild flowers of a thousand tender and sacred associations.”<sup>1</sup>

Some years ago there were ecclesiastics who took a lively interest in Comparative Mythology. Students of Pagan religions as well as Christian missionaries were bent on discovering more striking and more startling coincidences<sup>2</sup> in order to use them in confirmation of their favourite theory that some rays of a primeval revelation, or some reflection of the Jewish religion, had reached the uttermost ends of the world. Subsequently the study of Comparative Mythology seems to have lost much of its charm. Why?

“The theory that there was a primeval preternatural revelation granted to the fathers

<sup>1</sup> J. G. Frazer in his Preface to the second edition of *The Golden Bough*. Sir James (George) Frazer is the greatest living authority on Comparative Mythology. See also further remarks in the Appendix, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix, p. 93.

of the human race, and that the grains of truth which catch our eye when exploring the temples of heathen gods are the scattered fragments of that sacred heirloom—the seeds that fell by the wayside or upon stony places—would find but few supporters at present; no more, in fact, than the theory that there was in the beginning one complete and perfect primeval language, broken up in later times into the numberless languages of the world.” “The opinion,” again, “that the Pagan religions were mere corruptions of the religion of the Old Testament, once supported by men of high authority and great learning, is now as completely surrendered as the attempts to explain Greek and Latin as corruptions of Hebrew.”<sup>1</sup>

It will be as well, in the first place, to see exactly what the Church herself now says on the matter; how far she recognises that gigantic strides have been made in a study formerly pursued in a manner necessarily elementary by the Alexandrian schools; how far she concedes the conclusions of the modern anthropologist; and how far she approves of

<sup>1</sup> Professor Max Müller, in *The Science of Religion*, p. 40.



progressive revelation as the explanation for the whole enigma of the parallels between ancient beliefs and our own. For this purpose I think I cannot do better than quote from two striking articles on the subject in the *Church Times*. They were contributed by the editor of *The Treasury* magazine. "The study," he says, "of folk-lore, of anthropology, of primitive myth and ritual, has made enormous strides within the last quarter of a century, and the fruits of that study are now forced, *for the first time*,<sup>1</sup> upon the attention of the general public. Presented in outline, the situation is as follows: We have been accustomed to consider Christianity apart from all other religions. We have recognised, indeed, the historical preparation for it so far as that is described in the pages of the Old Testament; but we have thought of that preparation as conducted among a single people, and by means of a unique revelation. *Of pagan religions we have known practically nothing.* The mythology of the Greeks and Romans, which some of us had to learn at

<sup>1</sup> The italics are mine throughout this quotation; also words within brackets [ ].

school, seemed to be a collection of pointless fairy tales. And as regards other and more primitive races, both ancient and modern, the statement that 'the heathen, in his blindness, bows down to wood and stone' comprised accurately the sum of our knowledge. That there could be any but the vaguest likeness between them and our own beliefs were unimaginable. Possibly there was a belief in the Fatherhood of some supreme being, some vague conception of a future life; while sacrificial rites, as we knew, were not peculiar to the Jews. But the other doctrines of our Creed we regarded as exclusively our own. *The ideas of a Triune Godhead, of an Incarnate Saviour, of the Virgin Birth, of the Second Advent, of the Sacraments, of the Communion of Saints*—these seemed to be the distinctive possessions of Christianity; these were marks clearly dividing it from any form of paganism. So, at least, we imagined. [Had we not every reason thus to imagine on the authority of Holy Scripture?] But it proves that *we were completely mistaken. The modern study of primitive religion shows that every one of these*

*beliefs is, or has been, held in some part or other of the pagan world quite independently of Christian influence, and that, while we are bound to speak of these beliefs as, in a sense, distinctly Christian, to term them exclusively Christian is no longer possible. . . .* In these early mythologies we can discern the longing for a personal God, capable of direct communication with man, and for some sort of union between the divine and human natures. Whence did these instincts themselves originate? *The one tenable reply seems to be that they were God-implemented. . . .* The Zoroastrian anticipates the advent of a 'Saviour' (Saoshyas), who will end the strife between good and evil, personified as Ormuzd and Ahriman, by sweeping away evil from the earth. In the ancient Vedic and Scandinavian religions, in the Old-World creeds of Egypt and Babylon, in the legends of Mexico and Polynesia, is found, in a variety of guises, the same fundamental idea. Always there is a sense of a supremely righteous Power; of a world tainted with evil, and out of harmony with the Power above it; of the coming of some Deliverer, who will establish a kingdom

of righteousness. Once more, in many mythologies the idea of a Virgin Birth is associated with that of a Divine Incarnation. Men felt instinctively that the entrance of a Divine Being into the human race must take place in a miraculous way. And thus the Spirit of God, working by means of what we may term the instinctive feelings of mankind, prepared the human race throughout the world for the coming of the Son of God, to be born of a pure Virgin, to take our nature upon Him for evermore, and to redeem us from the power of sin. . . . We find conceptions, such as that of the Hindu *Trimurti*, which seem to remember the doctrine of the Trinity. In the sacramental meals of totem-worship, when a sacred animal is killed, and partaken of by the worshippers in order that its power may be communicated to them [not to mention "sacred" *men* killed with the same idea], there seems a dim anticipation of the highest Christian rite. Baptism as a cleansing and symbolical ceremony was known centuries before the Christian era. . . . These rites and beliefs, obscured by superstition and insufficient to satisfy the longing which brought

them into existence, were designed to serve as the schoolmasters who would lead the heathen at length to Christ (cf. Galatians iii. 24).''

These remarks, by a clergyman of the Church of England,<sup>1</sup> will enable the ordinary person, who for the most part knows nothing whatever about these things, to realise the immense importance of the questions raised by Comparative Mythology.

## § 2. *Parallels in Ancient Religions, and Some Remarks Upon Them.*

Before proceeding any further, it will be advisable to consider some concrete examples of the parallels between the beliefs and teachings of ancient religions and those of the Christian religion.

### KRISHNA AND BUDDHA.<sup>2</sup>

*Krishna.*—Krishna was a miraculous incarnation of Vishnu in the womb of Devaki. A chorus of angels exclaimed : “ In the delivery of this favoured woman nature shall have cause to exult.” The birth was indicated in the

<sup>1</sup> See also Appendix, p. 98.      <sup>2</sup> See Appendix, p. 98.

heavens by a star. On the morning of his birth the spirits of heaven danced and sang, and the clouds emitted low, pleasing sounds. Though royally descended, he was actually born in a cave. The divine child was recognised and adored by cowherds. He was presented with gifts of sandalwood and perfumes. The holy Indian prophet, Narada, paid him a visit, consulted the stars, and declared him to be of celestial descent. His birth was beset by peril, and his foster-father was warned by a heavenly voice to fly with the child, as the reigning monarch, King Kansa, might take his life. The king ordered the massacre in all his States of all the male children born during the night of the birth of Krishna. One of the first miracles performed by Krishna, when mature, was the curing of a leper. A lame woman came with a vessel filled with spices and sweet oil, and anointed his head. Krishna was slain. At his death a black circle surrounded the moon, and the sun was darkened at noonday. Spirits were to be seen on all sides. Krishna descended into hell, rose again from the dead, and ascended bodily into heaven, many

persons witnessing his ascent. He is to come again on earth in the latter days. He will appear as an armed warrior riding a white horse. At his approach the sun and moon will be darkened, the earth will tremble, and the stars fall from the firmament (compare Rev. vi. 2, 12, 13). He is to judge the dead at the last day. Krishna is the Creator of all things visible and invisible, and is the beginning, middle, and end of all things. Krishna was transfigured before his beloved disciple, Arjuna. Krishna was the meekest of beings. He preached sublimely. According to the purer Vaishnava faith, he was pure and chaste in reality; any amorousness related of him is to be explained allegorically, as symbolising the longing of the human soul for the Supreme; just as the amorous "Song of Solomon" is said to be allegorical, and to mean "Christ's love for his Church." Krishna even condescended to wash the feet of the Brahmins. He is the incarnation of Vishnu, the second person in the Hindoo Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva; and Vishnu in his incarnations is a saviour, protector, and friend. Krishna said: "Let a man, if seeking God by

deep abstraction, abandon his possessions and his hopes, betake himself to some secluded spot, and fix his heart and thoughts on God alone." And, again: "Then be not sorrowful; from all thy sins I will deliver thee." Many other such remarkable passages might be adduced from the Bhagavadgita. Justice, humanity, good faith, compassion, disinterestedness—in fact, all the virtues—are said to have been taught by Krishna, both by precept and example; but we must remember, as Monier Williams informs us in his *Hinduism*, that Krishna, in the ancient epic poems, is simply a great hero, and it is not until about the fourth century B.C. that he is deified and declared to be an incarnation of Vishnu. In conclusion, the accounts of Krishna's childhood agree very closely with the apocryphal accounts of Christ's childhood.

*Buddha*.—If the similarity between the histories of Krishna and Jesus is remarkable, what shall we say of that between the mythological<sup>1</sup> portions of the history of Gautama

<sup>1</sup> "We are accustomed to find the legendary and the miraculous gathering, like a halo, around the early history of religious leaders, until the sober truth runs the risk of being altogether neglected for the glittering and edifying



Buddha and the history of Jesus? Looked upon as a confirmation of Progressive Revelation, it is nothing short of marvellous, whether we regard the similarity in events, characters, actions, or sayings. From Buddha's divine incarnation until his entry into Nirvāṇa, almost every important episode of the life of Christ appears to be paralleled. Attendant miraculous events, spotless character, wonderful doings, cherished sayings—all are here.

Buddha was miraculously<sup>1</sup> born of the pure and holy Maya. He descended into her womb from heaven in a spiritual manner. There was joy in heaven, the Devas singing: "To-day Bodhisatwa is born on earth, to give joy and peace to men and Devas." He was recognised by the aged and devout Asita as the perfect Buddha come to the world for its salvation. His life was threatened by the King Bimbisara, who was advised to destroy the child. He was presented in the temple. When still a mere child he was found to be as proficient as his masters, and he

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falsehood" (*Enc. Brit.*, vol. iv., art. "Buddhism," p. 424). This process is recognised as a universal rule. What grounds have we for assuming that Christianity is exempt from it?

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 103.

disputed with learned doctors. His ancestry was traced from his father to Maha Sammata, the first monarch of the world. He bathed in water, the spirits making their presence known as he did so. When about to adopt a religious life, he fasted for a long time, and was tempted by Mara, the author of Evil ; but he heeded not the words of the Evil One, and bade him depart from him. The heavens showed their appreciation of this defeat by raining flowers. Towards the end of his life he was transfigured when on a mountain in India called Pandava. He performed great miracles. For instance, on one occasion he floated through the air across a river ; and, on another, he caused a tempest to cease, and so saved a disciple, who was in imminent danger of shipwreck. Shortly before his death a weeping woman embraced his feet. When Buddha died many miracles occurred. The coffin was opened, and the body uncovered, supernaturally. He promised that another Buddha would be sent to them. He foretold his departure, and after death entered Nirvana. He was very early regarded as omniscient and absolutely sinless. Earth and heaven did homage to him at birth

and death. A great earthquake occurred at his Temptation. He is represented as saying : " Let all the sins that are committed in the world fall upon me, that the world may be delivered " ; and again : " Hide your good deeds, and confess before the world the sins you have committed " ; and again : " Though the great world be swallowed up and pass away, yet be assured the words of Buddha are true " ; and again : " Beware of fixing your eyes upon women " ; " A wise man should avoid unchaste life, as if it were a burning pit of live coals " ; " One who is not able to live in a state of celibacy should not commit adultery." According to Buddha, the motives of all our actions should be pity, or love for our neighbour. Those who became his disciples were told they must renounce the world, give up their riches, and take the vow of poverty. Finally, we should note that Buddha aimed to establish a " Kingdom of Heaven " (Dharma-chakra) ; that the account given by St. Peter (Ep. ii., ch. 3) of the earth once destroyed by water, and about to be destroyed by fire, is in agreement with the Buddhist story ; and that some later Jewish teachers believed in the

pre-existence of souls and a modified form of metempsychosis (transmigration of the soul).

It is difficult to separate fiction from fact ; but the generally accepted records show that, together with superior natural endowments, Gautama Buddha attained to an exceptional purity of life and integrity of purpose. Probably he never arrogated to himself any higher authority than that of a teacher ; but his followers, turning for consolation to the theory that he still lived, exalted him, within a quarter of a century of his death, to a place among their deities. As already mentioned, he was very early regarded as omniscient and absolutely sinless. All sorts of legends, borrowed from current myths, attach themselves to the story of his life, while his teaching as a simple-hearted, truth-seeking philanthropist became encrusted with the superstitions and religious speculations that were current. As with Krishna, so here there are stories of Buddha's childhood of which the apocryphal stories of Christ's childhood are an almost exact reproduction.

PARALLELS OTHER THAN KRISHNA AND  
BUDDHA.

In the case of Krishna and Buddha it is contended by some Christian writers that the stories must have been borrowed from Christian sources, both canonical and apocryphal. This contention, founded on the lateness of the mythical stories in literary form, will be considered in due course; but first let us have clearly before our minds those parallels concerning which there is no such contention, for the simple reason that there is no getting away from the fact that the beliefs existed long before the advent of Christ. In ancient religions other than Hinduism and Buddhism, there are, among many others, distinct parallels to—the Virgin Birth; the Heavenly Choir; the Epiphany; the Slaughter of the Innocents; the Temptation and Forty Days' Fast; the Miracles; the Crucifixion, Darkness, and Descent into Hell; the Resurrection and Ascension; the Second Coming and Day of Judgment.

*The Virgin Birth.*—According to Chinese legends, the sages Fohi (? 3468 B.C.) and

Lao-Kiun (about 600 B.C.) were born of virgins. Dean Milman mentions in his *History of Christianity* that the first Jesuit missionaries who went to China were appalled at finding in the mythology of that country a counterpart of the story of the Virgin. In Persia, Zoroaster,<sup>1</sup> the founder of the Perso-Iranian national religion, was miraculously conceived. All attempts to connect him with Hebrew influences are groundless. In Egypt, Horus, who had the title of Saviour, was born of the virgin Isis.<sup>2</sup> The Egyptian Bible, remember, is the oldest in the world ! Plutarch mentions the notion of the Egyptians that a woman might conceive by the approach of some divine spirit. Egyptian monuments represent the infant saviour in the arms of his virgin mother, or sitting on her knee. The image of the child was worshipped just as the Bambino is worshipped in Rome to-day. Women then, as now, believed in its efficacy for their relief in time of nature's sorrows. In Grecian and Roman mythology the " Sons

<sup>1</sup> Zarathustra, or Zoroaster, was possibly a historical person. We are quite in the dark as to the precise date. Duncker places him about the year 1000 B.C.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix, p. 105.

of Jove"—Hercules, Bacchus, Amphion, Perseus, Mercury, Æolus, Apollo, and others—have mortal mothers. Speaking of this, the Christian Father, Justin Martyr, declared that the myths regarding the multitude of sons of gods, and especially the myth regarding the virgin's son Perseus, had been invented by the demons in order to rob the manifestation of Jesus, the true Son of God, of its importance. He also insisted that, with their doctrine of the Virgin-birth of Jesus, of His passion, and of His ascension, the Christians were affirming nothing new as compared with what was alleged of the so-called sons of Zeus.<sup>1</sup> Even regarding Plato there was a legend that his mother, Perictione, had experienced a miraculous conception through the influences of the God Apollo, and that the God had declared to Aris, to whom she was betrothed, the parentage of the child (compare St. Matthew i. 20). This was believed in by the disciples of Plato centuries before the Christian era. Among northern nations the sons of Odin take the place of the sons of

<sup>1</sup> Apol. I. 54 and I. 21. Quoted in the *Enc. Bib.*, art. Mary."

Jove. Thus "Baldur the Good," the Beneficent Saviour, was the son of Odin and Friga. The worship of Friga was continued until that of the Virgin Mary took its place. In Mexico, the "Saviour" Quetzalcoatl was born of a pure virgin, who was called the "Queen of Heaven." An ambassador from heaven announced to the virgin Sochiquetzal, mother of Quetzalcoatl, that it was the will of God that she should conceive a son without connection with man. Here we have an exact parallel to the annunciation of the Virgin Mary (St. Luke i. 26-35) in a part of the globe that was not discovered by Christians till nearly 1,500 years after the birth of Christ! Similar traditions of Saviours are found among various tribes of North and South America.

Regarding the tendency to believe in Incarnations, Dr. Illingworth<sup>1</sup> explains that "a general tendency in the human mind to expect a thing cannot possibly be twisted into a presumption against its occurrence. . . . The fact of the expectation does not logically make invention a likelier alternative than

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 78-9 of his important work, *Divine Immanence*.



occurrence, except upon one hypothesis—namely, that the occurrence is impossible.” This argument skims over—or, I might almost say, neglects—the real contention of the Rationalist. Let us assume that incarnation is not ruled out of court as being *a priori* impossible; the virgin-birth of Jesus was subsequently invented by the Christian Church because its eminent suitability necessitated its invention. Only thus could the divinity and sinlessness of Jesus Christ be firmly established. More especially would this be the case in an age when everyone was familiar with the notion of virgin-born Saviours. The minds of men were deeply imbued with the idea of miraculous birth in the case of anyone claiming to be of divine origin. Only on this understanding would the heathen, already believing in their own virgin-born Saviours, have accepted Christianity.

*The Heavenly Choir.*—Even Confucius, the celebrated philosopher (born 551 B.C.), was ushered into the world with dragons and angels hovering about the couch, and with the sound of heavenly music in the air. At the birth of Osiris, the father of Horus, another Egyptian

“Saviour,” a voice was heard proclaiming that the “Ruler of all the earth is born.” There was joy in Olympus when Apollo was born, and at the time of the birth of Hercules his father Zeus spoke from heaven, and said: “This day shall a child be born of the race of Perseus, who shall be the mightiest of the sons of men.”

*The Epiphany.*—Legends of the coming of wise men to see an infant grew up in various places. Krishna was visited by sages who brought perfumes. Confucius has a somewhat similar legend, and one occurs even in connection with the birth of Plato.

*The Slaughter of the Innocents.*—The story of the “dangerous child” is almost universal. Horus, Zoroaster, and Bacchus, for example, were “dangerous” children.

*The Forty Days’ Fast and the Temptation.*—According to Pliny, Zoroaster lived for thirty years in the wilderness upon cheese. The Devil made Zoroaster magnificent promises; but the temptations were in vain. The ancient Persians had a religious festival, which they annually celebrated, called the “Salutation of Mithras” (the sun-god), and

during it *forty days* were set apart for sacrifice and thanksgiving. Among the ancient Egyptians the priest submitted to abstinence of the most severe description. "The priests in Heliopolis," says Plutarch, "have many fasts, during which they meditate upon divine things." Fasting and self-denial were observances required of the Greeks who desired initiation into the mysteries. The same practice was found among the ancient Mexicans and Peruvians. The Mexicans had a *forty days'* fast, in memory of Quetzalcoatl, who was tempted and fasted *forty days* on a mountain. Lord Kingsborough says: "The temptation of Quetzalcoatl and the fast of forty days . . . are very curious and mysterious." <sup>1</sup> Mr. Bonwick says: "The Spaniards were surprised to see the Mexicans keep the vernal forty days' fast." <sup>2</sup>

Turning to the Old Testament, we may remind ourselves that Moses went up into a mountain to receive certain instructions from God, and "was there with the Lord *forty days and forty nights*, and he did neither eat bread

<sup>1</sup> *Mexican Antiquities*, vol. vi., pp. 197-200.

<sup>2</sup> *Egyptian Belief*, p. 370.

nor drink water." On a second occasion, when he received the Ten Commandments, he was again with the Lord *forty days and forty nights*, and did neither eat bread nor drink water. Elijah fled to the desert, where an angel gave him cake and water, and in the strength of that meat he went for *forty days* without food. The number "forty" occurs over and over again in that portion of the Old Testament which the Higher Criticism has shown to be unhistorical. The Rationalist avers that the number "forty" is mythological, and that we have this story of the Forty Days' Fast and the Temptation in the New Testament because the writer wishes to show that Jesus Christ was proof against all temptation; that He, too, as well as other Christs, could resist the powers of the Prince of Evil. It may be urged that in all these cases the number is quite immaterial. Are we not, then, to take the author of "The Acts" literally when he informs us that Christ spent *forty days* on earth after His resurrection?

*The Miracles.*—Not only Krishna and Buddha, but all leaders of religious movements, had the reputation of having per-

formed miracles. Religions were established as much by the miracles as by the preachings. Miracles were needed in those days on all special occasions. Many of them are attested in the gravest manner by the gravest writers, and were firmly believed at the time by the people. Healing miracles, such as those performed by Jesus,<sup>1</sup> were the commonest of all. The Gospel miracles are in no respect singular or more wonderful. Horus, as well as Krishna, *raised the dead to life*. Bacchus *changed water into wine*. Æsculapius not only cured the sick, but *raised the dead*. Pausanias, the eminent Greek geographer and historian, writes that in the temple of Æsculapius at Epidaurus there was an old pillar dedicated to the memory of Hippolytus, who had been *raised from the dead*.<sup>2</sup> Apollonius of Tyana was celebrated for the wonderful miracles he performed. He caused a devil to depart out of a youth, and he *restored a dead maiden to life*. The Christian Fathers inform us that Simon Magus, with the Devil's aid, could make his appearance wherever he pleased at

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 106.

<sup>2</sup> Middleton's *Works*, vol. i., pp. 63, 64.

any moment; could poise himself in the air; produce trees from the earth suddenly [the mango tree trick?]; fling himself from high precipices unhurt [the very feat suggested by the Devil in the Temptation]; and walk through the streets accompanied by spirits of the dead. Tacitus, the celebrated Roman historian, tells us that the Emperor Vespasian (born 9 A.D.) performed wonderful miracles for the good of mankind, and among others he describes the *cure of a blind man with the emperor's spittle*.

*The Atonement.*—In China the Holy One (Tien) dies to save the world. “The sufferings and death of Osiris were the great mystery of the Egyptian religion. His being the divine goodness, and the abstract idea of ‘good,’ his manifestation upon earth (like an Indian god), his death and resurrection, and his office as judge of the dead in a future life, look like the early revelation of a future manifestation of the deity converted into a mythological fable.”<sup>1</sup> While Osiris is the judge, Horus, his son, is the mediator. In the Judgment scene in the Book of the Dead,

<sup>1</sup> Rawlinson's *Herodotus*, vol. ii., p. 260, note 3.

Horus, the son of Isis, leads the deceased, after his heart has been weighed, into the presence of Osiris (see Papyrus of Ani, plates 3 and 4). Mithras, the sun-god of the Persians, was the "Mediator" between God and men—the "Saviour," who, by his laborious conflicts, worked their salvation. He was also called the "Word." Attys, called the "Only Begotten Son" and the "Saviour," was worshipped by the Phrygians, and represented by them as a man tied or nailed to a tree. Adonis was another virgin-born "Saviour" who suffered for mankind. The yearly festival of Adonis in the spring was a special favourite with women. In the Old Testament reference is made to the weeping of the women over Tammuz, the Babylonian equivalent of Adonis (Ezekiel viii. 14). According to the Rev. Sir G. W. Cox,<sup>1</sup> he was the crucified Tao (divine love personified). The Rev. Dr. Parkhurst, in the chapter on the Resurrection in his Hebrew lexicon, says: "I find myself obliged to refer Tammuz to that class of idols which

<sup>1</sup> See his work, *Mythology of the Aryan Nations*, vol. ii., p. 113.

were originally designed to represent the promised Saviour, the desire of all nations." Prometheus was a Saviour who suffered the most fearful tortures as the friend of the human race. Æschylus's tragedy, *Prometheus Bound*, was acted in Athens *five hundred years before the Christian era*. Even Bacchus, whom most of us think of as the rollicking wine-god of classical mythology, was a slain Saviour.<sup>1</sup>

When we turn to the New World we find the worship of a crucified Saviour among the ancient Mexicans and Peruvians. Lord Kingsborough tells us that, according to the belief of the ancient Mexicans, "the death of Quetzalcoatl *upon the cross*" was "an atonement for the sins of mankind."<sup>2</sup> Dr. Daniel Brinton relates how the Aztecs had a feast which they celebrated *in the early spring*, when "victims were nailed to a cross and shot with an arrow."<sup>3</sup> Alexander von Humboldt, in his *American Researches*, also speaks of a feast, at which the Mexicans *crucified* a

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 107.

<sup>2</sup> *Mexican Antiquities*, vol. vi., p. 95.

<sup>3</sup> *Myths of the New World*, p. 166.



man and *pierced* him with an arrow. The Rev. J. P. Lundy, speaking of this, says: "Here is the old story of Prometheus crucified on the Caucasus, and of all other pagan crucifixions of the 'young incarnate divinities of India, Persia, Asia Minor, and Egypt.'" <sup>1</sup>

*Moral Teachings.*—There is an extraordinary similarity not only in beliefs, but also in moral teachings. The teachings of Confucius, Mencius, and Wang Yang Ming might, as Professor Nitobe points out,<sup>2</sup> just as well be considered plagiarisms from the Divine library, for they furnish numerous remarkable parallels to the New Testament teaching. Taoism, the philosophy of Laotze, for a long time successfully rivalled the more utilitarian system of Confucius, and its close agreement with many of the teachings of Christ is most noticeable. The morals of the ancient Egyptians are clearly set forth in the Book of the Dead, which came into use after 2000 B.C. They indicate a far higher standard than existed in Israel, in

<sup>1</sup> P. 393 of *Monumental Christianity, or the Art and Symbolism of the Primitive Church as Witness and Teachers of the One Catholic Faith and Practice*. (See also Appendix, p. 108.)

<sup>2</sup> In his book, *Bushido*, pp. 15-19 and 24.

David's time. "Yet," as Dr. Callaway remarks,<sup>1</sup> "in traditions which still linger among us, the law under which David lived and reigned was perfect and divine; while the name of Egypt stands for darkness and sin."

With regard to the parallels in the moral teaching, Dean Farrar, in his work, *Seekers after God*, has clearly shown that "to say that pagan morality kindled its faded taper at the Gospel light, whether furtively or unconsciously, that it dissembled the obligation and made a boast of the splendour, as if it were originally her own, is to make an assertion wholly untenable." He points out that the attempts of the Christian Fathers to make out Pythagoras a debtor to Hebraic wisdom, Plato an "Atticising Moses," Aristotle a learner of ethics from a Jew, Seneca a correspondent of St. Paul, were due "in some cases to ignorance, in some to a want of perfect honesty in controversial dealing."

*Apocryphal Gospels.*—We are assured by Christian writers that the parallels between the accounts of Krishna's and Buddha's

<sup>1</sup> P. 152 of his book, *King David of Israel* (Watts).

childhood and those in the apocryphal gospels of Christ's childhood are due to the Hindoos having borrowed legends current among the early Christians. The late Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, who was the keeper of Egyptian and Assyrian antiquities in the British Museum, informed us, however, that "several of the incidents of the wanderings of the Virgin with the child in Egypt, as recorded in the Apocryphal Gospels, reflect scenes in the life of Isis as described in the texts found on the Metternich Stele."<sup>1</sup> And, again, he said: "In the apocryphal literature of the first six centuries which followed the evangelisation of Egypt, several of the legends about Isis and her sorrowful wanderings were made to centre round the mother of Christ."<sup>2</sup> The evidence is conclusive that certain legends prevalent among the early Christians were borrowed from the ancient Egyptian religion; yet we are to believe that where the Krishna and Buddha parallels are concerned the borrowing process was the other way! So be it. Let us suppose that certain Egyptian

<sup>1</sup> *The Gods of the Egyptians*, vol. ii., p. 220.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. i., Preface, p. xv.

superstitions reached the Hindoo through the medium of the Christian; the fact remains that beliefs once held by devout but unlettered Christians have a heathen origin. This is of serious import, for it lends weight to the suspicion that the marvellous tales in the canonical gospels have been similarly derived from heathen legends—legends from which some of the more glaring absurdities and all that would mar the ethical ideals of the Christian religion were eclectically expunged.

#### ARE THE KRISHNA AND BUDDHA LEGENDS BORROWED FROM CHRISTIANITY?

I have indicated a few of the more striking parallels in other religions besides Krishnaism and Buddhism. Did space permit, it could be shown that there are also parallels to the teaching of Christ, the darkness at the Crucifixion, the descent into Hell, the Resurrection, the claim of Jesus Christ to be "Alpha and Omega" (according to the Revelation of St. John), the prophecy of the Second Coming, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the doctrine of the Trinity, the worship of the Blessed Virgin, the Christian

symbols (cross, triangle, I.H.S., fish, serpent, dove, and lamb). I cannot understand what the Christian cause can gain by ascribing the parallels in Hindoo mythology to Christian sources, when there is all this mass of evidence for parallels that are quite as extraordinary (though less numerous) in those ancient religions where their priority to Christianity cannot reasonably be denied. Certainly the Krishna and Buddha parallels are extremely numerous and strikingly exact; but a policy which seeks to explain them in a different manner from that adopted in the case of the same phenomena in other religions, while it serves to confirm the suspicions of the sceptic, is doomed eventually to failure. This being so, it is unnecessary, I think, to enter at any great length into the controversy.

In J. M. Robertson's book, *Christianity and Mythology*, there is a scholarly investigation from which I extract the following leading points<sup>1</sup>:—Hindoos, as Professor Tiele urges, could perfectly well have borrowed, if they did borrow, from Egypt before Christianity

<sup>1</sup> They appear in Part II., pp. 171, 183, 188, 300, and 302.

was heard of. There is hardly a leading detail in the Krishna birth legend which is not variously paralleled in other early non-Christian mythology. The more we collate the main Christian myth-notions with those of Krishnaism, the more clearly does it appear that, instead of the latter being borrowed from the former, they are, not indeed the originals from which Christianity borrowed, but always presumptively the more ancient, and in one or two cases they do appear to be the actual sources of Gospel stories. The lateness of the Purânic stories in literary form is no argument against their antiquity. Scholars are agreed that late documents often preserve extremely old myth-material. The leading elements in the Krishna myth are inexplicable save on the view that the cultus is ancient. The close coincidences in the legends of Krishna and Buddha<sup>a</sup> are to be explained in terms of borrowing by the latter from the former, and not *vice versa*. I should add here that the denial of the "Christian accretions" theory does not convey also the implication that the Bible story was borrowed from the Krishna and Buddha myths. On the

contrary, the strong probability is that there has been little or no borrowing either way—that there is a common source for both in earlier Aryan and Semitic myths.

In the Introduction to his standard work, *The Romantic History of Buddha*,<sup>1</sup> Beal refers to the legends concerning the pre-existence of Buddha in heaven—his miraculous incarnation—salutation by angels—recognition by Asita (Simeon)—presentation in the Temple—baptism by fire and water—disputation with doctors—temptation in the wilderness—life passed in preaching and working miracles, &c.—and frankly admits that, “if we could prove that they were unknown in the East for some centuries after Christ, the explanation would be easy; but all the evidence we have goes to prove the contrary.” Regarding the parallelisms with the Apocryphal Gospels, he says: “It would be a natural inference that many of the events in the legend of Buddha were borrowed from the Apocryphal Gospels (compare, for

<sup>1</sup> A translation of the Chinese version of the “Abhinish-Kramana Sūtra.” For the probable date, see Appendix, p. 108.

example, the *Gospel of the Infancy*, chap. xx. : 'Our Lord learning his alphabet,' with the account given in chap. xi. of this volume), if we were quite certain that these Apocryphal Gospels had not borrowed from it." In his later work, *Buddhist Literature*, Beal modifies his position.\*

Neither Max Müller in his *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, nor Forlong in his *Short Studies of the Science of Comparative Religions*, nor Senart in his learned work, *La Légende du Buddha*, nor Seydel in his *Evangelium von Jesu* and his *Buddha Legends*, nor Pfeleiderer in his *Urchristentum*, supports the theory of Christian accretions. Bunsen, in his *Angel-Messiah*, maintains (p. 18) "that, according to Sanscrit and Chinese scriptures and the stone-cut edicts of Asoka and the Sānchi Tope, certain legends about Buddha circulated in India and China, not only before the apostolic age, but more than three centuries earlier," and that "among these legends the most ancient are those which refer to the incarnation of Buddha as the Angel Messiah."

On page 10 of Rhys Davids's well-known



little work, *Buddhism* (published under the direction of the S.P.C.K.), we read : “ There is every reason to believe that the Pitakas now extant in Ceylon are substantially identical with the books of the Orthodox Canon, as settled at the Council of Patna about the year 250 B.C. As no works would have been received into the canon which were not then believed to be very old, the Pitakas may be approximately placed in the fourth century B.C., and parts of them possibly read back very nearly, if not quite, to the time of Gautama himself.” On page 15 it is explained that, when the statements in the Sanscrit and Pali texts agree, the greatest reliance may be placed upon them, “ not indeed as to the actual facts of Gautama’s life, but as to the belief of the early Buddhists concerning it.” Rhys Davids enumerates the more important of these early beliefs, and they include many of the startling coincidences which I have noticed. The later beliefs he passes over for the most part in silence ; but, speaking generally, he is of opinion that the greater portion, if not all, of the legends could be explained by hero-worship, mere poetical

imagery, misapprehension, the desire to edify, applications to Gautama of previously existing stories or sun-myths, and so on. Nowhere does he state or imply that in any of the legends, early *or* late, there can be any application to Gautama of the Gospel stories of the life of Christ; while he considers M. Senart's theory of the almost complete dependence of the Buddha legends on solar myths "most interesting." Now, it is just those very ideas of virgin-birth, resurrection, and ascension appearing in the later legends which were nothing more nor less than solar myths. In any case, whatever their origin, they were world-wide very many centuries before the Christian era; so any argument from the lateness of these legends is founded upon sand. In his *Buddhism*, as also in his article on Buddhism in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Rhys Davids steers clear of the question of the parallels; but in his *Buddhist Sutras*, translated by him from the Pali and appearing in the "Sacred Books of the East" series, we read (in the Introduction, p. 165) that while he "ventures to disagree with writers who argue that the resemblances in the Pali Pitakas and

passages in the New Testament indicate that the New Testament as the later must be borrowed," he holds that the resemblance is due *not to any borrowing on the one side or the other*, but "solely to the similarity of the conditions under which the two movements grew" [and, the Rationalist would add, a similarity in the myths afloat was a part, and a very essential part, of the similarity of the conditions].

So also with regard to the lateness of the Krishna legends in literary form, it is futile to argue that they are, to use a familiar term, cribbed from the canonical and apocryphal gospels, when most of them are obviously plagiarisms of the ancient sun-myths. The Rev. Sir G. W. Cox, speaking on this subject in his *Aryan Mythology*, says: "There is no more room for inferring foreign influence in the growth of any of these myths than, as Bunsen rightly insists, there is room for tracing Christian influence in the early epical literature of the Teutonic tribes. Practically the myths of Krishna seem to have been fully developed in the days of Megasthenes (fourth century B.C.), who identifies him with the

Greek Hercules." [Megasthenes wrote a work on India, which was the chief source of the later Greek information on the subject.] Monier Williams, the accepted authority on Hinduism, writing for the S.P.G., in his book, *Indian Wisdom*, and speaking of the *Bhagavadgita*, says: "It may reasonably be questioned whether there could have been any actual contact of the Hindoo system with Christianity without a more satisfactory result in the modification of Pantheistic and anti-Christian ideas." Again, he says: "The religious creeds, rites, customs, and habits of thought of the Hindoos generally had altered little since the days of Manu, 500 years B.C." In his *Hinduism* (p. 19) he shows that "we may be justified in assuming that the hymns of the Veda were probably composed by a succession of poets at different dates between 1500 and 1000 years B.C." This is an important concession, because the ancient hymns of the Veda furnish the germs of those sun-myths which tell of the death, resurrection, and ascension of a virgin-born saviour.

Whatever may be thought of the

conclusions of the highest authorities regarding Krishnaistic and Buddhistic beliefs, I hope I may have carried the reader so far with me that he will be prepared to admit that there are very many striking resemblances to the Gospel stories in those ancient beliefs whose priority to Christianity is not disputed. Now that these resemblances are no longer attributed to a device of the Evil One, an explanation for them is urgently required. The explanation from the Christian side is the theory of a Progressive Revelation; and, apparently, there can be no other, if Christianity be true. The reader has been put in possession of a few details of the remarkable parallels, and he should apply this theory for himself to each and all of them, and see whether it furnishes a fair working hypothesis, whether his mind can accept the explanation now offered to him, and, I might almost add, whether he can honestly continue to call himself a Christian believer. Let him ask himself which is the more probable, that in the common mythos we have marvellous anticipations of the Bible stories, or that in the latter we have reproductions of the former?

§ 3. *Parallels in the Beliefs of Primitive Man, and Some Remarks Upon Them.*

I must ask the reader's patience if I postpone my final remarks on Progressive Revelation until I have adduced some illustrations of the beliefs and customs of primitive man, as here also this theory and its implications have to apply. Thus far the pagan beliefs have appeared to be of a comparatively harmless character; but this can by no means be said of the beliefs of savage man. He does not confine himself, like his more civilised brother, to mystical beliefs in Saviours who once upon a time suffered for him, and whose body and blood are to be *symbolically* assimilated; but, being of a realistic (or shall we say materialistic?) turn of mind, he prefers (the inevitable result of a restricted intellectual development)<sup>1</sup> to satisfy his religious emotions with the spectacle of a real human-divine sufferer, and by a sacrificial feast of real flesh and blood. Can this be God's method of revealing Himself? True, the religious convictions of civilised

<sup>1</sup> See Herbert Spencer's *Principles of Sociology*, Vol. I., Part I., chapter on "The Primitive Man—Emotional."

man have been a fruitful source of human agony, both physical and mental, in many a bloody fight and massacre, in cruel and relentless persecutions, in every refinement of excruciating torture and pitiable distress to body and mind; but it is possible to gloze over all this with various specious arguments. It is not so easy to do this with examples drawn from the history of savage races. The only thing is that so few have ever had these examples brought before them, or, at least, have ever thought of connecting them with anything that has to do with the truth of Christianity. I shall, therefore, now give some illustrations of the beliefs and customs of primitive man. A vivid description may succeed in convincing the reader of the absurdity of the new theory, where mere vague ideas of savage ritual would fail. "Of the human sacrifices of rude peoples, those of the Mexicans are perhaps the most instructive, for in them the theanthropic character of the victim comes out most clearly." <sup>1</sup> "When we go to the records of

<sup>1</sup> Professor Robertson Smith, in *The Religion of the Semites*, p. 347. Dr. W. R. Smith was a distinguished Scottish Biblical scholar and Orientalist. From 1881 he

the cultures and creeds of Mexico and Peru, records wonderfully preserved in the teeth of the fanaticism which would have destroyed them all if it could, we stand clear of the frauds and prejudices alike of Jew and Christian. . . . We are faced by a civilisation and a religion that reached wealth and complexity by normal evolution from the stages of early savagery and barbarism without ever coming in contact with those of Europe till the moment of collision and destruction.”<sup>1</sup> We shall begin, therefore, with the ancient American.

#### THE RELIGIONS OF ANCIENT AMERICA.

“Terrible was the prestige of the priesthood of Mexico. The greater the State grew, the larger were the hecatombs of human victims. Almost every god had, to be propitiated in the same way; but above all must the war-god be for ever glutted with the smoking hearts of slain captives. Scarcely any historian, says Prescott, estimates the

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was associated as joint editor of the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* with Professor Spencer Baynes, after whose death in 1887 he was sole editor.

<sup>1</sup> J. M. Robertson's *Pagan Christs*, pp. 373-4, first edition.



number of human beings sacrificed yearly throughout the Empire at less than 20,000, and some make it 50,000. The Franciscan monks computed that 2,500 victims were annually sacrificed in the town and district of Mexico alone. Of this doomed host, Huitzilo-pochtli had the lion's share; and it is recorded that at the dedication of his great new temple A.D. 1486 [that is to say, nearly 1,500 years after God was pleased to reveal Himself definitely to mankind] there were slain in his honour 70,000 prisoners of war, who had been reserved for the purpose for years throughout the Empire. They formed a train two miles long, and the work of priestly butchery went on for several days." <sup>1</sup>

"At every festival of the God there was a new hecatomb of victims, and we may conceive how the chronic spectacle burnt itself in on the imagination of the people. . . . And then the horror of the sacrificial act! In the great majority of the sacrifices the victim was laid living on the convex stone

<sup>1</sup> For this and the following graphic accounts I am indebted to *Pagan Christs*, Part IV.—"The Religion of Ancient America."

and held by the limbs, while the slayer cut open his breast with the sacred flint (or rather obsidian) knife—the ancient knife used before men had the use of metals, and therefore most truly religious—and tore out the palpitating heart, which was held on high to the all-seeing sun, before being set to burn in incense in front of the idol, whose lips, and the walls of whose shrines, were devoutly daubed with blood.”

“ In connection with one annual festival of Tezcatlipoca, the Creator and ‘soul of the world,’ who combined the attributes of perpetual youthful beauty with the function of the God of Justice and Retribution, as the Winter Sun, there was selected for immolation a young male captive of especial beauty, who was treated with great reverence for a whole year before being sacrificed. . . . When all was over the priests piously improved the occasion, preaching that all this had been typical of human destiny, while the aristocracy sacramentally ate the victim’s roasted limbs.”

“ They [Christians] mystically eat the body of the slain God. Now, this very act was performed by the Mexicans, not only literally

as we have seen, but in the symbolic way also; and they connected their sacraments with the symbol of the *cross*."

"That the Mexicans were no longer cannibals by taste is shown by the fact that in the great siege by Cortez they died of starvation by thousands. They never ate fellow citizens: only the sacrificially slain captive."

"The strangest thing of all is that their frightful system of sacrifice was bound up not only with a strict and ascetic sexual morality, but with an emphatic humanitarian doctrine. If asceticism be virtue, they cultivated virtue zealously. There was a Mexican Goddess of Love, and there was of course plenty of vice; but nowhere could men win a higher reputation for sanctity by living in celibacy. Their saints were numerous. They had nearly all the formulas of Christian morality, so-called. The priests themselves mostly lived in strict celibacy; and they educated children with the greatest vigilance in their temple schools and higher colleges. They taught the people to be peaceful, to bear injuries with meekness, to rely on God's mercy and not on their own merits; they taught, like Jesus and the

Pagans, that adultery could be committed by the eyes and the heart; and, above all, they exhorted men to feed the poor. The public hospitals were carefully attended to, at a time when some Christian countries had none. They had the practice of confession and absolution, and in the regular exhortation of the confessor there was this formula: Clothe the naked and feed the hungry, whatever privations it may cost thee; for remember their flesh is like thine, and they are men like thee; cherish the sick, for they are the image of God. And in this very same exhortation there was further urged on the penitent the special duty of instantly *procuring a slave for sacrifice to the deity.*"

The Mexican believed in the resurrection of the Man-God. Sir James Frazer relates how "the idea that the God thus slain in the person of his representative comes to life again immediately was graphically represented in the Mexican ritual by skinning the slain man-god, and clothing in his skin a living man, who thus became the new representative of the godhead." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from his celebrated book, *The Golden Bough*.

It is civilisation that determines the tone of religion. In Peru, where the civilisation was higher and the priesthood less powerful, the sacrificial system was less burdensome and less terrible. Thus human sacrifices were practically extinct. The Peruvians had the institution of a Holy Communion, in which they ate of a sacred bread, *sancu*, sprinkled with the blood of a sacrificed sheep, the priest pronouncing this formula : " Take heed how ye eat this *sancu* ; for he who eats it in sin and with a double will and heart is seen by our Father, the Sun, who will punish him with grievous troubles." The Spaniards themselves recognised that the Mexicans ate the mystical body of the God with every sign of devotion and contrition ; and they were so far from depreciating the Peruvian Communion that they supposed St. Bartholomew had established it.

With these facts confronting us, it is nothing short of marvellous to find many learned divines completely ignoring them in their apologetic efforts. I say marvellous, for I assume they possess honesty of purpose and some acquaintance with ancient beliefs ; but

perhaps I am wrong in the latter assumption. The continuance of the celebration of the Holy Eucharist until the present day is held to be one of the evidences for the Christian faith, and this on the ground that the rite could not have survived if Christ had not founded it. For some reason, best known to the apologist, the almost universal observance of the same ceremony, ages before the Christian era, and its survival among the nations who finally adopted Christianity, are entirely overlooked. Thus Dr. Maclear, in his book, *The Evidential Value of the Holy Eucharist*, says: "The singular rite has survived all the vicissitudes of more than 1,000 years. . . . The early Christian would inform a supposed questioner that the meal was a sacrificial feast, instituted by Him from Whom we are called Christians, and Who died for us on the Cross. Here, then, we are on solid ground. The rite, so *unique and so unprecedented*, rests on an objective historical fact." One would think that Dr. Maclear had entirely neglected the study of ancient and even modern non-Christian <sup>1</sup> beliefs.

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 109.

## VEGETATION GODS.

There is another class of primitive sacrificial custom which claims our careful attention, in order that we may see whether it manifests the beginning of a revelation from God. Even if we could agree that all these gruesome details represent a savage's glimmerings of the truth, we must allow that the theory collapses when the object of the custom can be shown to have little or nothing to do with religion in any true sense of the word. Subtle intellects are capable of maintaining that the worship of ancestors, or of the Sun, or of imaginary devils, betokens a dim perception of God;—but when it comes to the propitiation of a vegetation-god solely for the sake of the material benefits expected to be derived from his cult, surely it is time to dismiss the theory as worthless. “All the world over, savages and semi-civilised people are in the habit of sacrificing human victims, whose bodies are buried in the field with the seed of corn, or other bread stuffs. Often enough the victim's blood is mixed with grain in order to fertilise it. The most famous instance is that of the

Khonds of Orissa, who chose special victims, known as Meriahs, and offered them up to ensure good harvests. The Meriah was often kept years before being sacrificed. He was regarded as a consecrated being, and treated with extreme affection, mingled with deference."<sup>1</sup> "The periodical sacrifices," Sir James Frazer tells us, in *The Golden Bough*, "were generally so arranged by tribes and divisions of tribes that each head of a family was enabled, at least once a year, to procure a shred of flesh for his fields, generally about the time when his chief crop was laid down." Khonds in distress often sold their children as Meriahs, "considering the beatification of their souls certain, and their death, for the benefit of mankind, the most honourable possible." Their children were representatives of the Deity. With advancing civilisation we have the substitution of an animal in place of the human representatives of the god. In some cases the worshippers tore the living animal to pieces with their teeth. The rending and devouring of live

<sup>1</sup> See "Gods of Cultivation" in Grant Allen's *Evolution of the Idea of God*.



bulls, calves, and goats seems to have been a regular feature of the Dionysiac rites, the participators in the orgy fancying that they were devouring the actual body and blood of the god. With the further advance of civilisation (or, according to the latest Christian theory, with the further advance of God's revelation), as in the Mediterranean region, the bodies of the gods of agriculture were eaten by their votaries in the shape of cakes of bread, or other food stuffs, and their blood was drunk in the form of wine.

If Grant Allen and Frazer be right as to the priority of the idea of a vegetation-god in cults commonly associated with the Sun, then Krishna, Osiris, Dionysus or Bacchus, Adonis, Attis, and other Saviours whose deaths and resurrections were annually celebrated at the spring equinox (our Easter), may have been primarily vegetation-victims, the abstract ideas which identified the death and resurrection of the god with the annual winter sleep and spring revival being finally fathered upon the worship. In answering the question, "By what successive steps did men come to frame for themselves the

conception of deity? " Grant Allen gives it as his opinion that their ideas were inevitable, that "man's relation with the external universe was certain *a priori* to beget them as of necessity."

Whatever explanation may be the correct one for the phenomenon of a common mythos over the greater portion of the globe, it is certainly not that of a Progressive Revelation. Such an explanation has never been mooted by anyone but the Christian apologist. "Among early men and savages every act of life has a sacred significance, and agriculture especially is everywhere and always invested with a special sanctity. To us it would seem natural that the act of sowing seed should be regarded as purely practical and physiological; that the seed should be looked upon merely as the part of the plant intended for reproduction, and that its germination should be accepted as a natural and normal process. Savages and early men, however, had no such conceptions. To them the whole thing is a piece of natural magic."<sup>1</sup> Are we, then, to

<sup>1</sup> *The Evolution of the Idea of God* (chapter on "The Gods of Cultivation").

regard this working of primitive thought as the working of the Holy Spirit? Surely we may dismiss such a preposterous theory? It will serve the Church no good purpose; for, while thinking men will be further than ever estranged, it will furnish the militant agnostic with a fresh weapon for his attacks upon her.

#### WHY MEN EAT THEIR GOD.

Whatever may have been the ultimate origin of the idea of God, and of the belief in His expiatory death and subsequent resurrection, the origin of the custom of eating Him sacramentally permits of a very simple explanation. "Du Chaillu notes that some of his West African followers, when going on an expedition, brought out the skulls of their ancestors (which they religiously preserved) and scraped off small portions of the bone, which they mixed with the water and drank, giving as a reason for this conduct that their ancestors were brave, and that by drinking a portion of them they too became brave and fearless. Here we have a simple and early case of that habit of 'eating the god' to whose universality and importance Dr. Frazer

has called attention.”<sup>1</sup> It is a common early belief, which may still be met with, that by eating a certain animal the consumer will become possessed of its qualities. It is notorious, for instance, that the Miris of Northern India prize tiger’s flesh for men, because it gives them strength and courage. And apparently the same belief exists also in Southern India, for I remember our Madrassi ayah—a Christian by the by—begging for the hind leg of a panther (shot by my wife), and explaining that she wanted to eat it in order to make her *muzbut* (strong). I may mention also that certain religious rites still in vogue among the Hindoos—disgusting as they are, not only to our ideas, but in fact—arise from a similar notion.

Herbert Spencer discusses this primitive idea in his *Principles of Sociology*. He explains how “attributes or properties, as we understand them, are not recognisable by the savage—are abstractions which neither his faculties can grasp nor his language express. Hence certain beliefs, everywhere conspicuous

<sup>1</sup> *The Evolution of the Idea of God* (chapter on “The Origin of Gods”).

among the uncivilised. A special potency which some object or part of an object displays belongs to it in such a wise that it may be acquired by consuming or possessing this object or part. The powers of a conquered antagonist are supposed to be gained by devouring him. The Dakotah eats the heart of a slain foe to increase his own courage; the New Zealander swallows his dead enemy's eyes that he may see further; the Abipone consumes tiger's flesh thinking so to gain the tiger's strength and ferocity—cases which recall the legend about Zeus devouring Metis that he might become possessed of her wisdom. Clearly the implied mode of thought, shown even in the medical prescriptions of past ages, is a mode of thought necessarily persisting until analysis has disclosed the complexities of causal relations.”<sup>1</sup> “The belief that the qualities of any individual are appropriated by eating him is illustrated by the statement of Stanbridge, that when Australians kill an infant they feed an older child with it, believing ‘that by its eating as much as

<sup>1</sup> *Principles of Sociology*, vol. i. (chapter on “Primitive Ideas,” p. 102).

possible of the roasted infant it will possess the strength of both.' Elsewhere dead relations are consumed in pursuance of an allied belief. We read of the Cucamas that, 'as soon as a relation died, these people assembled and ate him roasted or boiled, according as he was thin or fat ! ' " <sup>1</sup>

It is easy, then, to understand why a savage should desire to partake of the flesh of an animal or man whom he regards as divine. By eating the body of the god he shares in the god's attributes and powers. " And when," as Sir James Frazer points out,<sup>2</sup> " the god is a corn-god, the corn is his proper body ; when he is a vine-god, the juice of the grape is his blood ; and so by eating the bread and drinking the wine the worshipper partakes of the real body and blood of the god." If the apologist, nothing daunted, maintains that there is a religious germ in these primitive superstitions, it is practically tantamount to saying that every superstition contains such a germ ; that superstition and religion are, in

<sup>1</sup> *Principles of Sociology* (chapter on " Inspiration, Divination, Exorcism, and Sorcery," p. 241).

<sup>2</sup> In *The Golden Bough*.

fact, often synonymous terms. I thought it was only the sceptic who said that. Before accepting a supernatural theory which is so obviously untenable, I do entreat my fellow man to read carefully the works of great thinkers who have made primitive man their especial study. Let him read, for instance, Herbert Spencer's *Principles of Sociology*, where he will find a natural and mind-satisfying explanation of primitive ideas concerning supernatural agents, ghosts, spirits, demons, gods, resurrection, another life, inspiration, divination, sacrifices, fasting, propitiation, and prayer. He will learn, also, much that he ought to know concerning ancestor-worship, idol-worship, fetish-worship, animal-worship, plant-worship, nature-worship, and the heathen deities generally. Let him read, too, Frazer's *Golden Bough*, J. M. Robertson's *Pagan Christs* and *Christianity and Mythology*, and other scholarly and informing works of this description, instead of confining his studies to works of an apologetic character, where everything incompatible with existing Christian theories is carefully omitted, or coloured out of all recognition.

§ 4. *The Solar Myth.*

## JONAH AND THE WHALE.

The resemblances to ancient myths are not confined to the principal incidents in the life of Christ. Many of the most noteworthy events related in the Old Testament have their counterpart in widespread legends. That the stories of the Creation, Fall, and Deluge are legends is well known—a visit to the British Museum should convince the most captious critic on this point—but it is not so well known that ancient folk-lore contains stories similar to those of the Tower of Babel, the trial of Abraham's faith, Jacob's vision of the ladder between earth and heaven, the finding of Moses in an ark, the transformation of Moses's rod into a serpent, the Israelites' passage through the Red Sea on dry land, Moses smiting the rock and thus producing water, the reception by Moses of the Ten Commandments from God, Balaam's expostulating ass, Joshua's command to the sun and the sun's obedience, Samson and his exploits, Elijah's ascent to heaven, and Jonah's sojourn



for three days and three nights in the belly of a fish.

This Jonah episode has an important bearing on the subject under discussion, as it is a typical case of an absorption of the universal mythos. Among other authorities, Godfrey Higgins tells us: "The story of Jonas swallowed up by a whale is nothing but part of the fiction, of Hercules, described in the Heracleid or Labours of Hercules, of whom the same story was told, and who was swallowed up at the very same place, Joppa, and for the same period of time, three days." <sup>1</sup> Again, with the exception of those who refuse to acknowledge anything damaging to the literal truth of Holy Writ, all professors of theology are agreed that the miracle recorded in the book of Jonah is not a historical fact. This in spite of the alleged personal interviews with God as there recounted; while the plea that we must make allowance for oriental imagery serves only to throw discredit upon historians on whom we are relying for *facts* upon which the scheme of Christianity depends. Now, the story of the three days' sojourn of Hercules

<sup>1</sup> *Anacalypsis*, vol. i., p. 638.

and other heroes in the bowels of the earth, or the belly of a fish, is only a different version of the myth concerning the death and resurrection of a god which we find to be prevalent over nearly the whole world. And, according to the new Christian theory, this shows an intuition of Christ's death and resurrection !

#### ANTICIPATIONS OF CHRISTIANITY IN SOLAR MYTHS.

The advanced theologians, who are presenting us with this theory, have to explain, among other things, how it was that Christ himself took the "Jonah and whale" story seriously, treating it as sober history. He spoke of no mere allegory when He said : "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly ; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." <sup>1</sup> Neither Christ Himself nor the Apostles spoke of any revelation embodied in *heathen* beliefs. Very much the reverse. Yet the late Bishop Gore, speaking to the

<sup>1</sup> St. Matthew xii. 40.

adversaries of Christianity, informs them :  
“ You say that we find in Christianity the relics of paganism. On the contrary, we find in paganism, intermingled with much that is false, superstitious, and horrible, the *anticipations of Christianity*.” Is that why we have paid paganism the compliment of adopting the dates of the birth and death of its Saviours? <sup>1</sup>  
The late Canon P. H. Robinson goes so far as to say that Christianity has benefited by the addition of heathen thought [N.B. He owns there has been this addition], and that it is yet to benefit by further contact with heathen thought ! His actual words are : “ *If Greek and Roman thought were needed for a full appreciation of the meaning of the Incarnation, why may we not say the same of Indian and Chinese thought ? Surely we are justified in believing that every country and every people have something to contribute to Christianity, and that the completion of the Christian revelation awaits the contribution of each. We believe that there are many important aspects of the Christian truth which have never been understood, simply because Christianity has not yet*

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 110.

*been reflected in the experience of those nations of the world which are still heathen.'*<sup>1</sup>

#### THE CHRISTIAN THEORY IGNORED BY SCIENCE.

The earliest attempts at a crude science of mythology were efforts to reconcile the legends of the gods and heroes with the religious sentiment which recognised in these beings objects of worship and respect. When the Christians first approached the problem of heathen mythology, they agreed with St. Augustine that the gods were real persons—but diabolical, not divine. "Some later philosophers, especially of the seventeenth century, misled by the resemblance between Biblical narratives and ancient myths, came to the conclusion that the Bible contains a pure, the myths a distorted, form of an original revelation."<sup>2</sup> Now, however, in tracing myths and legends to their probable origins, the modern mythologist never dreams of calling to his aid any such theory.

These myths present, I take it, two main problems—first as to their origin, and second

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in the Character of Christ*, vi. 102.

<sup>2</sup> *Encyc. Brit.*, art. "Mythology."

as to their resemblances to Biblical narratives. Some mythologists, while no longer allowing orthodox tradition to hamper them, profess to answer only the first question. They disclaim the obligation of entering the arena of theological controversy. It is important that the Church should thoroughly realise this, and that any disagreement there may be among mythologists as to the solution of the first problem—the origin of myths—has little or no bearing upon the solution of the second problem—the Bible parallels. What does it matter whether the gods had a vegetable or a solar origin, or arose, as Max Müller thought, from “a disease of language”? The all-important question for Christians is: Can any of these possible origins point to a Progressive Revelation, and, if not, how are we to account for the Bible parallels?

#### THE SUN AS A SYMBOL.

Suppose that, whatever the ultimate origin may have been, certain myths containing the parallels are, as we know them, solar myths (and on this point mythologists of distinction

are agreed); how can a belief be, at one and the same time, a solar myth and also an allegory expressing a spiritual truth? We are asked to imagine that beliefs based on errors can enshrine a great truth. The sun is the object of worship, and its apparent movements gave rise to myths concerning the birth, death, and resurrection of a Saviour which entailed horrible cruelties. Can we envisage these happenings as Revelation in its course? Can the sun be a symbol? "Certainly," our apologists will exclaim, "is there no bright Sun of Righteousness—no personal and loving Son of God, of whom the material sun has been the type or symbol, in all ages and among all nations? What power is it that comes from the sun to give light and heat to all created things? If the symbolical sun leads such a great and heavenly flock, what must be said of the true and only begotten Son of God? If Apollo was adopted by early Christian art as a type of the Good Shepherd of the New Testament, this interpretation of the sun-god among all nations must be the solution of the universal mythos. What other solution can it have? To what other

historical personage but Christ can it apply? If this mythos has no spiritual meaning, all religion becomes mere idolatry, or the worship of material things.”<sup>1</sup>

Will this sort of reasoning satisfy the average man? To begin with, the sun-worshippers themselves had no idea that the sun was, as is now alleged, the symbol of a great Truth. The sun itself, or their conception of the sun as a divine person in a blazing car, was the phenomenon they worshipped.<sup>2</sup> What a waste of worship for thousands upon thousands of years!—worship that might have been centred upon the true God. Even now, nigh on 2,000 years after God was pleased at last definitely to reveal Himself, as we are told, to all mankind, the greater portion do not know Him, or they deny Him. If God intended the sun to be a symbol of Christ, why have we never been told this before? Why even now is it only put forward by a certain school of apologists in costly books that few will ever set their eyes upon? It is noteworthy, too, that the horrors that accompanied the worship

<sup>1</sup> See p. 117 of *Monumental Christianity*.

<sup>2</sup> See also Appendix, p. 111.

of this same "bright Sun" are discreetly kept in the background by the pious protagonists of this "symbol" theory.

§ 5. *Concluding Remarks on Christian and Anti-Christian Theories.*

If Progressive Revelation be true, it is the most marvellous proof of the truth of Christianity—far the greatest proof that has ever yet been presented to us. Far greater, for instance, than the prophecies of those so-called prophets of the Old Testament, who, it now transpires, were only anticipating or describing events of their own times. It is such a proof as Christianity is in dire need of just now—a proof that will save her from a peril which every hour brings nearer. Why, then, do we hear so little of this great discovery from the pulpit? How comes it that it is discovered so many years after the fulfilment of these unconscious prophecies of the pagans? Why is it produced merely to confute the sceptic and restore confidence to that infinitesimally small number who happen to have studied, and therefore to have had their



suspensions aroused by, Comparative Mythology? We are to believe that God revealed Himself by an exceedingly slow and painful process, extending over thousands upon thousands of years, and entailing the most horrible customs among savages. This process, mark you, not only led to the establishment of Christianity as the world became more civilised, but to the establishment of those other great religions which to this day are hostile to the reception of Christianity! Simple-minded people will never be induced to agree that revelation can be progressive in the manner now indicated to us by the apologist. Rather they will agree with the Rationalist, who denies the originality of Christianity, contending that it is a cult which adopted, step by step, the mysteries, the miracles, and the myths of the popular Gentile religions. Some scholars, indeed, go so far as to say that the whole Gospel story is nothing more than a myth; but the greater number consider that there is a substratum of truth,<sup>1</sup> and that round this have slowly gathered the religious ideas and doctrines that

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 112.

were current in the old pagan world. The precise manner in which, they conjecture, the transformation actually took place is a large subject, and there are differences of opinion—*e.g.*, some are inclined to think that Essenism, others that Mithraism, played a leading part; but the point to be borne in mind is that there is no difficulty whatever in understanding how the absorption of myths could have taken place, or how the Christian cult could have arisen and prospered.

I especially mention this because some apologists argue that there was not sufficient time for heathen accretions between the death of Jesus and the writing of the Gospels. I can only reiterate the remark of the well-known professor of Church history, Dr. Harnack: "We know that the Gospels come from a time in which the marvellous may be said to have been something of almost daily occurrence. *We now know that eminent persons have not to wait until they have been long dead, or even for several years, to have miracles reported of them; they are reported at once, often the very next day.*" Also, I should call attention to the notes on Essenism and

Mithraism which follow this paragraph, as they contain the answer to this final objection. But, personally, I fail to see how the "time" objection can in any case be maintained when we remember that the whole world had already been conversant for ages past with stories of suffering Saviours, similar in all essentials to the Gospel narratives. Besides, we know that documents have been tampered with more or less (the sceptic says "more," the apologist "less"), and that the composition of the Gospels took place many years after the events they purport to describe. We know, too, that the age was one when men were extremely credulous, and when, consciously and unconsciously, imposing upon this credulity was the ordinary method of propagating a Creed.

## ARGUMENT FROM ESSENISM.

Regarding the difficulty of supposing that Jesus or the Evangelists could have been imbued with any sun-myth ideas, we must

take into consideration the existence at that time of the Jewish sect, the Essenes. It seems quite possible that they considered Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah they were expecting, and that they came over to Christianity in a body. This monastic brotherhood, living in settlements in the desert west of the Dead Sea—*i.e.*, within a day's journey of Bethlehem and Jerusalem—not only placed love of God, of goodness, and of man as articles in their programme, but also sought with wonderful energy, according to their lights, to realise them in their life. Bunsen assures us (p. 158 of his *Angel-Messiah*), and furnishes strong grounds for his opinion, that the Essenes introduced the new doctrine of an Angel-Messiah, and with it the doctrine of the atoning death of the Messiah, into Judaism and Christianity. Canon Cheyne likewise places them among the number of those who prepared the way for the new world religion. This seems to have been the very reason of their disappearance in the second century A.D.—Christianity dissolved them. So much so that the Essenes (often called Therapeutæ or healers) are identified by

Eusebius with the Christian monks, and this opinion was generally adopted by the Fathers (see chap. xvii., bk. ii., p. 117, of *The Church History of Eusebius*, translated by the Rev. A. C. McGiffert, under the editorial supervision of Henry Wace, D.D., and Philip Schaff, D.D.).

From a perusal of the article on the "Essenes" in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, it will be seen that Essenism is not a purely Jewish product, but that "Persian and Babylonian influence may reasonably be admitted." "Oriental influences were," Canon Cheyne informs us, "so to speak, in the air, and it is probable that the belief in the resurrection was not the only great debt which Jewish religionists owed to Zoroastrians." Bishop Lightfoot describes the Essenes as sun-worshippers. Is there, then, no likelihood of Jesus and His disciples being familiar with the ideas of sun-worshippers?

But, it may be urged, the teaching of Jesus Christ was opposed to Essenic doctrines in the matter of asceticism. True; but, in one way, this makes the case for the absorption of Essenic ideas all the stronger, for it would

account for the strange fact that the Christians approved of asceticism in spite of their own Master's example to the contrary. I do not wish to press this anti-Christian theory further than to say that it appears to me that, among others, it is one deserving of consideration. Presuming that in Jesus the Apostles were confronted with a personality of overwhelming attractiveness and power of appeal to themselves, their language can be interpreted throughout as their attempt to expound and pass on their experience to the world. In this attempt they were naturally driven to employ such conceptions as were current in their day, and notably those of Messianic anticipations and Greek philosophy. Assuming that the Gospels are without any important interpolations, and that the authors are the Evangelists, even then the partial insertion of solar-myths would not necessarily be tantamount to any conscious dishonesty on the part of the Evangelists; it only points to their impregnation with the Jewish beliefs, such as those of the Essenes, that were around them. If this theory be correct, the difficulty arising from the shortness of the

time between the Resurrection and the writing of the Gospels vanishes, since accretions of a later date would no longer be the sole cause for the events recorded by the Evangelists becoming inextricably entwined with mythical beliefs.

### ARGUMENT FROM MITHRAISM.

This argument is fully developed in Part III of J. M. Robertson's book, *Pagan Christs*, from which the following are quotations: "Mithraism was in point of range the most nearly universal religion of the Western world in the early centuries of the Christian era. As to this students are agreed. [Here the author gives in a footnote a formidable array of authorities.] To the early Fathers, we shall see, Mithraism was a most serious thorn in the flesh; and the monumental remains of the Roman period, in almost all parts of the empire, show its extraordinary extension." Robertson points out that there are a number of monuments in honour of

Mithra in England, France, Italy, Germany, and in many Mediterranean ports. He then proceeds to give us some exceedingly important information regarding Mithraism, out of which I select the following extracts for the more particular attention of Christians :—

“ We have the cultus of Mithra as the Sun-god, the deity of light and truth, created by, and yet co-equal with, the Supreme Deity, and fighting on the side of the good against the evil power, Angra-Mainyu (Ahriman)—this at a period long before the Christian era. . . . Mithra comes to occupy a singular position as between the two great powers of good and evil, Ormuzd and Ahriman, being actually named the Mediator, and figuring to the devout eye as a humane and beneficent God, nearer to man than the Great Spirit of Good, a Saviour, a Redeemer, eternally young, son of the Most High, and preserver of mankind from the Evil One. . . . The first day of the week, Sunday, was apparently from time immemorial consecrated to Mithra by the Mithraists; and as the Sun-god was pre-eminently ‘ the Lord,’ Sunday was the ‘ Lord’s Day ’ long before the Christian era.



. . . We have some exact information as to the two chief Mithraic ceremonies or festivals, those of Christmas and Easter, the winter solstice and the vernal equinox, the birthday of the Sun-god, and the period of his sacrifice and his triumph. . . . There were in antiquity, we know from Porphyry, several elaborate treatises setting forth the religion of Mithra; and every one of these has been destroyed by the care of the Church. . . . Of course, we are told that the Mithraic rites and mysteries are borrowed and imitated from Christianity. The refutation of this notion, as has been pointed out by M. Havet, lies in the language of those Christian fathers who spoke of Mithraism. Three of them, as we have seen, speak of the Mithraic resemblances to Christian rites as being the work of devils. Now, if the Mithraists *had* simply imitated the historic Christians, the obvious course for the latter would be simply to say so. . . . The Mithraic mysteries, then, of the burial and resurrection of the Lord, the Mediator, the Saviour; burial in a rock tomb and resurrection from the tomb; the sacrament of bread and water, the marking on the forehead with a mystic

mark—all these were in practice before the publication of the Christian Gospel. . . . Nor was this all. Firmicus informs us that the devil, in order to leave nothing undone for the destruction of souls, had beforehand resorted to deceptive imitations of the *Cross* of Christ. . . . Still further does the parallel hold. It is well known that, whereas in the Gospels Jesus is said to have been born in an inn-stable, early Christian writers, as Justin Martyr and Origen, explicitly say he was born in a cave. Now, in the Mithra myth, Mithra is both rock-born and born in a cave; and the monuments show the new-born babe adored by shepherds who offer first-fruits. . . . Now, however, arises the great question. How came such a cultus to die out of the Roman and Byzantine Empire after making its way so far, and holding its ground so long? The answer to that question has never, I think, been fully given, and is for the most part utterly evaded, though part of it has been suggested often enough. The truth is Mithraism was not overthrown; it was merely transformed. . . . Though Mithraism had many attractions, Christianity had more,

having sedulously copied every one of its rivals and developed special features of its own. . . . In the Christian legend the God was humanised in the most literal way; and for the multitude the concrete deity must needs replace the abstract. The Gospels gave a literal story: The Divine Man was a Carpenter, and ate and drank with the poorest of the poor. . . . Gradually the very idea of allegory died out of the Christian intelligence; and priests as well as people came to take everything literally and concretely. . . . This was the religion for the Dark Ages. . . . Byzantines and barbarians alike were held by literalism, not by the unintelligible: for both alike the symbol had to become a fetish; and for the Dark Ages the symbol of the cross was much more plausibly appealing than that of the god slaying the zodiacal bull. . . . A Mithraist could turn to the Christian worship and find his main rites unimpaired,<sup>1</sup> lightened only of the burden of initiative austerities, stripped of the old obscure mysticism, and with all things turned to the literal and the concrete, in

<sup>1</sup> See also Appendix, pp. 113-14.

sympathy with the waning of knowledge and philosophy throughout the world."

But I must now close these quotations, apologising to Mr. Robertson [this was written when he was with us] for making such a free use of his book, and advising my readers to study it. They will find that his facts are reliable; they are all backed by the highest authorities, however much the conclusions drawn from them may, at present, be a matter of opinion. Suffice it to say here that the coincidences between Mithraism and Christianity are indescribably marvellous, and require further explanation, if Mr. Robertson's theory of the absorption of the former by the latter be not very largely true. Whatever the substratum of real history may be, there is no doubt that there was every opportunity for an early absorption of Mithraism, and every probability that it took place to an extent which throws a flood of new light upon many Christian doctrines.

"The first six centuries were characterised by fierce controversies as to the most fundamental verities of the Christian faith, by the wholesale introduction of adult converts, who

brought with them heathen and Jewish habits of thought, and who were in many cases of a low type of civilisation; and the adulteration of the Gospel was further facilitated by the purely nominal adhesion of persons anxious to stand well with the first Christian Emperors. The period was one of incessant fermentation and of rapid and continuous change." These are not the words of J. M. Robertson, nor of any other freethinker, but are an extract from the resolution adopted by the Church Association in connection with the appeal by the late Dean Wace and others to the authority of the First Six Centuries. What a period to appeal to! When we know what we do of the credulity and the methods of certain "Fathers" of the Church, how can any rational being place in them any confidence whatsoever?

What steps do the Churches propose to take concerning these disclosures? Will they proclaim from the pulpit their new theory of a Progressive Revelation, or will they by their silence evince their own want of faith in this apology, and allow the storm of unbelief slowly to gather force until it bursts and overwhelms the orthodox Christian belief?

Knowledge of the facts so ably discussed by the late Rt. Hon. John Mackinnon Robertson will in time be widely disseminated. Let there be no mistake on this point. Here, for instance, are some instructive passages appearing on page 496 of the *Nineteenth Century*, September, 1905 :—

“ It has been truly observed that the recovery, only partial as it is, of the history of this religion [the Mithraic] is one of the most remarkable triumphs of historical and antiquarian research. Originating in Persia, it was spread through the Roman Empire by poor and humble converts, who were at first mainly soldiers; but gradually, like Christianity, it permeated all ranks, and its temples are found scattered over the whole civilised world, from Babylon to the hills of Scotland. Just as the religion of Isis did, it resembled that of Christ in being a religion of inward holiness, of austere self-discipline and purity; but the details of its resemblance are incomparably more close and curious. The briefest sketch of the matter is all that can be attempted here. According to Mithraic theology, God considered in His totality is a

Being so infinite and so transcendent that His direct connection with man and the universe is inconceivable. In order to become the father of man and creator, He manifested Himself in a second personality—namely, Mithra, who was in his cosmic character identified with the ‘unconquered sun,’ and, as a moral and intellectual Being, was the Divine Word or Reason, and, in more senses than one, ‘the mediator’ between man and the Most High. Life on earth, according to the Mithraic doctrine, is for man a time of trial. The Spirit of Evil, his adversary, is always seeking to destroy him—to crush him with pain and sorrow, or to stain his soul with concupiscence; but in all his struggles Mithra is at hand to aid him, and will at the last day be at once his judge and advocate, when the graves give up their dead, when the just are separated from the unjust, when the saved are welcomed like children into eternal bliss, and the lost are consumed in the fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. This Divine Saviour came into the world as an infant. His first worshippers were shepherds; and the day of His nativity was December 25th. His

followers preached a severe and rigid morality, chief among their virtues being temperance, chastity, renunciation, and self-control. They kept the seventh day holy, and the middle day of each month was a special feast of Mithra, which symbolised his function of Mediator. They had seven sacraments, of which the most important were baptism, confirmation, and a Eucharistic supper, at which the communicants partook of the divine nature of Mithra under the species of bread and wine."

*Addendum ; July, 1936.*

From the following passages out of *Modern Knowledge and Old Beliefs*—the sequel to *The Churches and Modern Thought*—it will be seen that the author's convictions, concerning the facts brought to light by the science of comparative mythology, remain unaltered :—

Sir James Frazer, the most eminent scholar in the comparative study of primitive superstition and religion, is happily still with us. His classic work *The Golden Bough* (2nd ed., 1900; 3rd ed., 1911; followed by other volumes; abridged, 1922) remains the standard authority on this subject. It is as up to date



to-day as it was yesterday in all that is essential for the disclosure of the truth about religion, and the following striking passage from the preface to the second edition still awaits the attention of the religious world :—

“ Well handled, it [the comparative study] may become a powerful instrument to expedite progress if it lays bare certain weak spots in the foundations on which modern society is built—if it shows that much which we are wont to regard as solid rests on the sands of superstition rather than on the rock of nature.”

If my readers will kindly turn to page 83 (Thinker's Library edition) of my book, *The Churches and Modern Thought*, where I have quoted Sir James Frazer's further observations, they will find that he is of opinion that the destruction of existing religious beliefs by “the battery of the comparative method” is “sooner or later inevitable.” Now, there is one shield, and one only, for Christianity and the other supernatural religions against this battery, or, to change the metaphor, but one trench to creep into for protection from the shells and liquid

fire of a foe that dares to attack their very origins. It is the theory of a Progressive Revelation.

It is because I thought this question one of extreme importance, and felt sure that the general public were wholly ignorant of it, that I devoted a considerable portion of my chapter on comparative mythology (Chapter IV) to a somewhat searching investigation of this new theological theory. I have given striking examples of the parallels between the beliefs, teachings, miraculous tales, and rituals of ancient religions and those of the Christian religion, parallels which it is proposed to explain away by this theory. I have shown also that the evolution of the idea of God, and, according to this latest apology, of the idea of His intended revelation of Himself, has been attended by the most hideous customs; by the untold agony, the appalling misery, of countless deluded men and women.

Speaking for myself, the progressive revelation theory is quite unacceptable, if only on account of the age-long suffering which accompanied the "progressive" (!) process.

[It is difficult enough to understand how the author of the plan of Evolution—a plan of torture and murder—can possibly be the God of Love that we long for and that every Theist worships, and now, according to the latest Christian apologetics, God is to be yet more discredited with a plan of Revelation by an infinitely slow process: a plan depriving man for countless ages of a knowledge of the truth and leading inevitably therefore to deplorable absurdities, hideous cruelties, and quite avoidable and unnecessary misery of every kind! Is not the suffering inherent in the plan of Evolution in all conscience fully sufficient?] This view is according to my personal judgment, and it is for my readers to form theirs after due study of the facts I have brought to their notice. But let me warn them of one thing: there is no half-way house where they may take refuge from the conclusions of Sir James Frazer and of every unbiased student of comparative mythology. Sir James, in his allusion to the destruction of beliefs by this science, has said “sooner or later.” If it is “later,” it will be because comparative mythology is a

branch of knowledge of which even highly educated persons are more often than not entirely ignorant. It has not come within their purview. It was not in the curriculum of the schools where they received their education. It has hitherto never been thought to have an educational value; certainly the Churches, which still have a big say in educational matters, have never made any move, although they should be the first to advocate the wide diffusion of information on comparative mythology if they really believe it affords a convincing proof of God's wish to reveal Himself.

## APPENDIX.

P. 3, line 20.—*Disclosures of the Higher Criticism.*

Among much else that has sooner or later to be rejected (see Chapter III of *The Churches and Modern Thought* and the sections on the Higher Criticism, pp. 47-55 of *Modern Knowledge and Old Beliefs*) the theory of Verbal Inspiration is now generally acknowledged to be untenable. The Churches, with the exception of the extreme fundamentalist, no longer consider themselves tied down to the theory that inspiration means that every statement of the Bible is literally or infallibly true. There is no reason, they maintain, why this admission should lead—as indeed it very often does lead—to loss of faith in the Bible and in the Christian Religion. Though many statements are untrue in point of fact, they are true in allegory. The full inspiration of the Bible remains intact.

But are the Churches facing all the facts concerning how the collection of books called the Bible have come down to us? Most people will, I feel sure, agree with Sir Frederic Kenyon when he says at the close of his book, *The Story of the Bible* (John Murray, 1936, 3s. 6d.): "It may be disturbing to some to part with the conception of a Bible handed down through the ages without alteration and in unchallenged authority; but it is a higher ideal to face the facts and to apply our best powers to the

solution of the problems which they present to us." What, I think, will come as a surprise to the general reader, when he peruses Sir Frederic's work, is that even the earliest existing manuscripts are but copies of copies of copies. Sir Frederic George Kenyon, G.B.E., K.C.B., F.B.A., &c., was, we must remember, for twenty-one years the Director and Chief Librarian of the British Museum and is a most distinguished student of philology and of ancient manuscripts.

P. 4, lines 7-8.—*A thousand tender and sacred associations.*

A list up to date of Sir James Frazer's numerous distinctions and publications can be seen in *Who's Who* for 1936. There is a popular abridged edition of *The Golden Bough* published by Watts, Johnson's Court, London, E.C.4.

The position in which Sir James finds himself is not uncommon. It is that of very many teachers of new knowledge—astronomers, geologists, physicists, biologists, anthropologists, zoologists, psychologists, ethicists, &c., who, in our day, do not have to and do not conceal known facts just because they happen to be irreconcilable with the Bible.

In the Preface of one of Sir James' latest works, *The Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religions* (being lectures delivered on the William Wyse Foundation at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1932 and 1933), he alludes to the life of his friend William Wyse, and tells us that it was "unswervingly devoted to the pursuit of truth and to all that is good and beautiful

in humanity." Assuredly the same may be said of the life of Sir James himself and of his fellow scientists generally.

We should note in this Preface that Sir James repeats his warning about the "batteries of science." Here it is man's belief in the possession of an immortal soul that the batteries are likely to bombard. The passages leading up to the warning are particularly noteworthy and run as follows: "On the question of how far the almost universal belief in the survival of the human spirit after Death, which is implied by the fear of the dead, can be regarded as evidence of the truth of that survival, opinions will doubtless always be divided. From the crudities, inconsistencies, and absurdities in which the belief commonly clothes itself, an impartial observer might be tempted to conclude that the spirits of the dead exist only in the imagination of the fond and foolish portion of mankind; but this conclusion, so little consonant with the natural wishes, and perhaps the instincts of humanity, is not likely to be ever popular, and it seems probable that the great majority of our species will continue to acquiesce in a belief so flattering to human vanity and so comforting to human sorrow. And it cannot be denied that the champions of eternal life have entrenched themselves in a strong, if not impregnable, position; for, if it is impossible to prove the immortality of the soul, it is, in the present state of our knowledge, equally impossible to disprove it. But the batteries of science have an ever longer range, and on this side they may yet make a deep breach in the frowning bastions of faith."

P. 4, lines 12-13.—*Bent on discovering more striking and more startling coincidences.*

It is here that the truth-seeker must be on his guard. Exaggerations may have crept in. Out of the vast array of amazing parallels presented by writers on comparative mythology there is quite possibly one here and there which has to be regarded with caution, if not decidedly rejected. Although the number and importance of these are trifling, the sooner they are definitely left out the better. Their retention serves but to confuse the issue. They give, too, a handle to apologists only too thankful for an excuse to slam the door on all protrusive parallels.

The position of the Churches to-day (1936) in this matter is somewhat bewildering owing to their tenets varying by degrees between strict fundamentalism—such as that of the Church of Rome, the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa, the Churches of Tennessee, &c.—and complete non-fundamentalism. The fundamentalist is, of course, unable to embrace Progressive Revelation with any warmth, if at all. His tenets forbid such an idea. With his firm belief in a primeval Revelation and a Fall, he finds his explanation for the parallels connected with these events, and not with any gradual evolution of a revelation. If very, very behind time, he may even follow the Fathers of the Church in attributing them to the Devil. The non-fundamentalist who accepts Evolution has his theory of Progressive Revelation; but, judging by its confinement largely to polemical circles, he is not, apparently, too enthusiastic about giving it wide



publicity. Perhaps this is because it is pregnable to the attacks alike of theists, deists, agnostics, and atheists. Any minimisation of the parallels or attribution to Christian accretions is therefore welcomed by him.

The fundamentalist will be in accord with the Rev. W. S. St. Clair Tisdall, D.D., when he says, "As we have already seen, there is good reason to believe that the true knowledge of God shone upon the cradle of our race. The noble vision became veiled, and Idolatry, with all its attendant abominations, shows itself in history as the result of a Fall which calls for restoration, rather than as the starting point of a continuous advance" (see page 126 of Tisdall's *Comparative Religion*, an Anglican Church Handbook). Previously (page 82), Dr. Tisdall had spoken of Jesus's well-known reply to the Jews (St. John vi. i. 51-8) and of the sun-worshippers of Persia, India, and Peru, and all the millions upon millions who have, throughout the ages, hoped to participate in the life of their God by actually or symbolically eating his flesh and drinking his blood. Referring to these things, he exclaimed: "Surely the world-wide instinct which, at whatever cost and though often with inhuman cruelty, led men always and everywhere, in ways however mistaken, to strive to attain this was not an altogether delusive one. Their God was the right one, though they had mistaken the way and needed to be rightly guided." And that right guidance was, I understand, given by Christ when he said: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in

you. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me." We are to conceive, therefore, that the habit, so long and so widely prevalent, of devouring "Gods" indicated an intuition of Christ's sacrifice. Instinct sensed that there had been a Fall of man and Original Sin, and thus the need of an Atonement, the need of a reconciliation of God and man, the sacrifice of a Saviour. [What a dreadful conception of the Almighty! Yet it was held by Jesus, and remains an important tenet of the Christian Faith!] Here, then, is an explanation for the parallels which fits in with fundamentalism, and its adherents ought to be only too eager to discover further striking parallels of this nature and to let the world hear of them and of what they portend.

As for non- or pseudo-fundamentalists, they will, despite any belief they may have in progressive revelation, be pleased to learn from Professor E. J. Thomas (see his *Life of Buddha*, 1927) that "in proportion to the investigator's direct knowledge of Buddhist sources the number of parallels seem to decrease." Or, again, putting their pet theory on one side, they will welcome, I feel sure, the statement recently made by the late Archdeacon of Westminster, the late Venerable Dr. R. H. Charles (a Church authority on Jewish and Christian eschatology), that he could find no trace of the doctrine of the atoning death of the Messiah before Christian times.

“progressive” argument, but it is opposed to the findings of scholars—Rhys Davids, whose *Buddhism* was published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, is among them—who inform us that this same idea is part and parcel of exceedingly ancient solar myths.

However, presuming that all these pious theorists are genuinely in earnest, what is difficult to understand, what leads to doubts of their complete sincerity, is the absence of any real endeavour on their part to introduce to the general public their all-important theories; theories which give such faith-inspiring explanations of the parallels. How many professing Christians, even among the quite well educated, have ever heard of them? In the case of the explanation that Revelation has been *progressive*, should this theory be indeed tenable, we have—bar a reappearance of miracles—the most remarkable proof of the truth of the Christian belief that it is possible to imagine. It should be expounded from every pulpit and press—and taught too, of course, in every Christian school—not absolutely wedded to fundamentalism.

In conclusion. If among the parallels mentioned by me there are any at all questionable, by all means let them be erased, but do not let this elimination form an excuse for omitting explanations of the thousand and one that are irrefutable. The parallels which chiefly concern us may be divided roughly into two kinds: those concerning doctrines and rites, and those concerning the actual events supposed to have occurred in the lives of the Saviours or Masters.” Regarding the first, it is the “attendant

abominations" which particularly demand an explanation in conformance with our longings for a Heavenly Father. It is called for from apologists of every school, from the protagonists of a restored or of a progressive revelation alike, and also, in some degree, from the non-Christian deist who preaches that God is Love. Regarding the second kind, every Christian Church is called upon to explain that strange likeness to the Bible stories which, given that we may use our reason, seems clearly to indicate that the latter are nothing more than simple copies of mythical stories prevalent for ages East and West.

P. 8, lines 23-4.—*A world tainted with evil.*

We may have been asking ourselves of late why the Churches of Christendom have not been more prominent in condemning this ghastly poison-gas business. A part answer—I omit motives of expediency such as sway the Church of Rome to-day—seems to me to lurk unsuspected in the doctrine of the Atonement, the basis of which is, to quote the psalmist, "Behold I was shapen in wickedness; and in sin hath my mother conceived me." (Psalm 51, used in the Communion Service of the Church of England. See also number 9 of the Articles of Religion on the subject of "Original or Birth-sin," which concludes: "Therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation.") With pious humility, man—and especially a woman as the pronouncement comes from men—is held by prophets and priests to be entirely to blame for his wrongdoings, nay, more—

incapable of going straight. He was, is, and always will be sinful. Then, absorbing primitive ideas about eating gods, &c., Christ, according to the Scriptures, and the Christian Church arrive at the conclusion that the sins of mankind are so grievous that only the blood of a Saviour, of the Son of God, can wash them away. Thus the hideous cruelty displayed in the employment of a maiming, agonizing poison is just what to expect of mafi, he is so unutterably wicked. We can but pray to our REDEEMER. What in reality it comes to—I am not accusing the Churches of thinking it out in this way—is that if man were to continue becoming more rational and humane, instead of still reverting back to savagery, the foundation of one of the chief dogmas of the Christian religion would disappear.

P. 10, line 5.—*Remarks by a clergyman of the Church of England.*

The views of Liberal Religion will be found in *The Place of Christianity among the Religions of the World*, by the late Rev. J. Estlin Carpenter (Hon. D.D. Glasgow, D.Theol. Jena and Geneva, Wilde Lecturer, Oxford, 1924, Principal of Manchester College, Oxford, 1906–15, author of *Buddhism and Christianity*, 1923, and other important works). Chapter IV, on the “Sacred Books of the East,” is a perfect mine of information on this topic, admirably conveyed.

P. 10, line 18.—*Krishna and Buddha.*

In Chapters XVIII and XIX of T. W. Doane's *Bible Myths and their Parallels in Other Religions*

(New York: The Commonwealth Company, 28 Lafayette Place) the mythological history of Krishna and the mythological portion of the history of Buddha are compared with the Bible stories of Jesus, and very many startling parallels are pointed out. The presentment is clear and forceful and I have followed it where possible. A special feature of Doane's work is the care invariably taken to quote the authorities for the statements advanced, and thus the task of critical examination by the scholar is lightened. Out of the numerous parallels claimed he will find one or two that are strained or, indeed, quite in error; but the vast majority of these close resemblances are indisputable, and they call with no uncertain voice for an explanation that will dispel the suspicion they so naturally engender.

In the case both of Krishna and of Buddha the author indicates some fifty parallels, the authorities consulted by him being:—

*Krishna.*

Monier Williams: *Hinduism.*

G. W. Cox: *The Myths of the Aryan Nations.*

Thomas Inman: *Ancient Faiths.*

Thomas Maurice: *Indian Antiquities.* Also *The History of Hindostan.*

Godfrey Higgins: *Anacalypsis.*

J. P. Lundy: *Monumental Christianity.*

D. O. Allen: *India, Ancient and Modern.*

Dupuis: *The Origin of All Religious Worship.*

Joguth Chunder Gangooly: *Life and Religion of the Hindoos.*

L. M. Child : *The Progress of Religious Ideas through Successive Ages.*

Samuel Johnson : *Oriental Religions.*

*Asiatic Researches*—Asiatic Researches, or Transactions of the Society instituted in Bengal for inquiring into the History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences, and Literature of Asia.

*Bhagavat-Geeta.* Translated from the original Sanscrit by Charles Wilkes.

*Vishnu Purana.* Translated from the original Sanscrit by H. H. Wilson.

### *Buddha.*

The above-mentioned *Hinduism, Anacalypsis, Progress of Religious Ideas, Origin of Religious Worship*, and :—

L'Abbé Huc : *Christianity in China, Tartary, and Thibet.*

Ernest de Bunsen : *The Angel-Messiah of Buddhists, Esseneſ, and Christians.*

Samuel Beal : *The Romantic Legend of Sakya Buddha from the Chinese Sanscrit* (being a translation of the Fo-pen-hing).

Viscount Amberley : *An Analysis of Religious Belief.*

R. Spence Hardy : *The Legends and Theories of the Buddhists compared with History and Science.*  
Also by the same author, *Eastern Monachism and A Manual of Buddhism.*

J. W. Rhys Davids : *Buddhism.*

Max Müller : *A History of Ancient Sanscrit Literature.*  
Also by the same author, *Introduction to the Science of Religion.*

In his *English Life of Jesus* Thomas Scott remarks : “ How these narratives [*i.e.* the New Testament narratives], unhistorical as they have been shown to be, came into existence, it is not our business to explain. . . . We must emphatically disclaim the obligation.” Mr. Doane found this attitude to be typical of many distinguished writers, and set himself the task of pursuing the subject from the point at which it was abandoned by them. He traced the myths and legends of the Old and New Testaments to their origin. As the information he required was widely scattered through very many volumes, ancient and modern, the compilation of his work took him a considerable number of years. His labour was not in vain, for he produced a volume of the greatest interest for all who care to investigate the faith they profess. This devotion of so much time to compiling and elucidating facts reminds one how it was the same with another serious student of the science of religion. Grant Allen tells us in the Preface to his celebrated work, *The Evolution of the Idea of God* (obtainable now in the Thinker’s Library Series): “ I have been engaged upon collecting and compiling materials for more than twenty years. I have been engaged in writing my book for more than ten.” As for the governing motive of Doane’s zeal to reveal the truth, we may recall the following memorable words of Professor Max Müller : “ A comparison of all the religions of the world, in which none can claim a privileged position, will no doubt seem to many dangerous and reprehensible, because ignoring that peculiar reverence which everybody, down to the mere



fetish worshipper, feels for his own religion and for his own god. Let me say, then, at once, that I myself have shared these misgivings, but that I have tried to overcome them, because I would not and could not allow myself to surrender either what I hold to be true, or what I hold still dearer than the truth, the right of testing the truth. All truth is safe, and nothing else is safe; and he who keeps back the truth, or withholds it from men, from motives of expediency, is either a coward or a criminal, or both" (*The Science of Religion*, page 11).

P. 11, line 5.—*Born in a cave.*

"Justin Martyr the Apologist, who, from his birth at Shechem, was familiar with Palestine, and who lived less than a century after the time of our Lord, places the scene of the nativity in a cave. This is, indeed, the ancient and constant tradition both of the Eastern and the Western Churches, and it is one of the few to which, though unrecorded in Gospel history, we may attach a reasonable probability" (see p. 20 of the cheap edition [1906] of Farrar's *Life of Christ*). The grotto of the manger in the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem is certainly a cave. Embedded in the rock is—I have seen it—a much kissed silver star bearing the inscription: "*Hic de Virgine Maria Jesus Christus natus est.*"

P. 11, line 21.—*Krishna was slain.*

The Vishnu Purâna speaks of his being shot in the foot with an arrow. Other accounts state that he was suspended on a tree. "On raconte fort diversement

la mort de Crishna. Une tradition remarquable et avérée le fait périr sur un bois fatal (un arbre), ou il fut cloué d'un coup de flèche" (quoted from Mons. Guigniaut's *Religion de l'Antiquité*, by Higgins; *Anacalypsis*, vol. i., p. 144). In the accounts given in the Mahâbhârata, Vishnu Purâna, and Bhagavat Purâna, the slaying is unintentional, but predestined. There appears to have been a crucifixion myth in ancient India; but Godfrey Higgins's assumption that Krishna was crucified rests mainly on an oversight of the archæologist Moor (see J. M. Robertson's *Christianity and Mythology*, pp. 294-9).

P. 14, lines 7-8.—*Almost every important episode of the life of Christ.*

"With the remarkable exception of the death of Jesus on the cross and of the doctrine of atonement by vicarious suffering, which is absolutely excluded by Buddhism, the most ancient of the Buddhistic records known to us contain statements about the life and the doctrines of Gautama Buddha which correspond in a remarkable manner, and impossibly by mere chance, with the traditions recorded in the Gospels about the life and doctrine of Jesus Christ" (quoted from p. 50 of Bunsen's *Angel-Messiah*).

P. 14, line 11.—*Buddha was miraculously born.*

Maya dreams that she is carried by archangels to heaven, and that there the future Buddha enters her right side in the form of a superb white elephant. Rhys Davids relates this legend on p. 183 of his

*Buddhism*, and in a footnote he says: "Csoma Korösi refers in a distant way to a belief of the later Mongol Buddhists that Maya was a virgin (As. Res. xx. 299); but this has not been confirmed. St. Jerome says (*Adversus Jovin.*, bk. 1): 'It is handed down as a tradition among the Gymnosophists of India that Buddha, the founder of their system, was brought forth by a virgin from her side.'" In Samuel Beal's *Romantic History of Buddha* (from the Chinese version) we read of Buddha's miraculous birth, and that there is ground to assume the prevalence of this belief for centuries before Christ. Bunsen, again (p. x. of his *Angel-Messiah*), speaks of the "Virgin Maya, on whom, according to Chinese tradition, the Holy Ghost had descended"; and elsewhere (e.g., pp. 10 and 25) he adopts this version of the legend. Dr. Knowling, in his apologetic work, *Our Lord's Virgin Birth and the Criticism of To-day*, pp. 53-4, lays stress upon the grotesqueness of the idea that a man should enter his mother's womb in the form of a white elephant. But, as Rhys Davids explains (p. 184 of *Buddhism*), there is nothing bizarre when the origin of the poetical figure has been ascertained. "The belief was borrowed from the older sun-worship, *'the white elephant, like the white horse [cf. Rev. vi. 2 and xix. 11, 14], being an emblem of the sun, the universal monarch of the sky.'*"

P. 15, lines 24-25.—*He was very early regarded as omniscient and absolutely sinless.*

Rhys Davids's remarks on the *early* growth of myths concerning Buddha, coming as they do from

a champion of the Christian cause, are full of significance for anyone who permits himself to think and who keeps an open mind. He says (p. 182 of *Buddhism*): "The belief soon sprang up that he could not have been, that he was not, born as ordinary men are; that he had no earthly father; that he descended of his own accord into his mother's womb from his throne in heaven; and that he gave unmistakable signs, immediately after his birth, of his high character and of his future greatness."

We have a perfect illustration of the possibility and rapidity of the legend-making process in the nineteenth century. The Bab (or "gateway") was a Persian reformer who suffered martyrdom at the hands of the authorities in 1850. Within forty years an evidently mythical version of his life was current among his followers in the form of a Gospel. Babism inculcates a high morality, and there is a possibility of its becoming paramount in Persia. For further information on this new religion see *Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi*, by Myron<sup>2</sup> H. Phelps (Putnam).

P. 19, lines 11-12.—*Born of the Virgin Isis.*

It is true, as Dr. Knowling points out (p. 56 of *The Virgin Birth*), and as I have personally seen, that in the inscriptions and scenes in the temple of Luxor "we have at least some elements of the glorifying of sensual desire which is so far removed from the chaste restraint and simplicity of the Evangelists." But the parallel is not a whit the less admissible because the same story appears in a fresh garb to suit the higher ideals of a new religion.

P. 24, footnote.—*Mexican Antiquities.*

Most of Viscount Kingsborough's life and fortune was devoted to his illustrated work, *Antiquities of Mexico* (nine volumes and a portion of a tenth volume, imperial folio, London, 1830-48). No anti-Christian spirit inspired his labours; on the contrary, he attempted to prove a Jewish migration to Mexico. Though the attempt failed, he bequeathed to posterity an invaluable work on the ancient religion of Mexico.

P. 26, lines 7-8.—*Healing miracles, such as those performed by Jesus.*

Conyers Middleton, formerly principal librarian of Cambridge University, tells us that in the temples of Æsculapius all kinds of diseases were believed to be publicly cured by the pretended help of the Deity, in proof of which there were erected in each temple columns of brass or marble, on which a distinct narrative of each particular cure was inscribed. There is a remarkable fragment of one of these tables still extant, and exhibited by Gruter in his collection (just as it was found in the ruins of the temple of Æsculapius in the Tiber island), which gives an account of two blind men restored to sight by Æsculapius, in the open view and with the loud acclamation of the people, acknowledging the manifest power of the god. Compare St. Matthew ix. 27-30. Is it not truly marvellous to think that exactly the same sort of thing is going on at the various miracle-working shrines of Christendom at the present moment? Is it not also surprising to

hear certain divines in our own country speak of the alleged miracles of the early Church as if they were real, and as if it were a sort of lost art due to our poorer faith in modern times? I am referring to sermons preached from various pulpits on the subject of Christian Science and Faith-cures.

P. 29, lines 6-7.—*Acted in Athens five hundred years before the Christian era.*

In the *Nineteenth Century* for March, 1905, Mr. Slade Butler points out, in his article on "The Greek Mysteries and the Gospel Narrative," that in the first century after Christ these mysteries, in one form or another, had become the recognised religion of the Greek world. Mr. Butler takes in turn all the main features of the Gospel narratives, and shows their close resemblance to incidents of the Greek mystery-dramas. The baptism of John, the triumphal procession in honour of Jesus, His clearing of the temple, *the cursing of the fig tree*, the Last Supper, the mocking of Jesus in His death-agony, are shown to have striking parallels in the sacred mysteries of the Greeks.

P. 29, lines 7-10.—*Even Bacchus . . . was a slain Saviour.*

Dupuis, *The Origin of all Religious Worship*, pp. 135 and 258; Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, vol. ii., p. 102; Knight, *The Symbolical Language of Ancient Art and Mythology*, p. xxii, note, and p. 98, note.

P. 30, lines 5-7.—*Pagan crucifixions of the young incarnate divinities of India, Persia, Asia Minor, and Egypt.*

We have it on the authority of a Christian Father that the Pagans adored crosses; for Tertullian, a Christian Father of the second and third centuries, writing to the Pagans, says: "The origin of your god is derived from figures moulded on a cross" (*Apol.*, chap. xvi.; *Ad Nationes*, chap. xii.). At the present moment, both in Europe and America, the Egyptian cross or "life" sign is a fashionable ornament, under the name of *crux ansata* (or cross with a handle). Its pious wearers are, of course, quite unaware that it is the phallic emblem! Could anything more conclusively demonstrate the prevailing ignorance of comparative mythology?

P. 36, footnote.—*The probable date of the origin of the story [of Buddha, Chinese version].*

"A very valuable date, later than which we cannot place the origin of the story, may be derived from the colophon at the end of the last chapter of the book. It is there stated that the Abhinish Kramana Sûtra is called by the school of the Dharmaguptas Fo-pen-hing-king. . . . We know from the 'Chinese Encyclopædia,' Kai-yuen-shi-kian-mu-lu, that the Fo-pen-hing was translated into Chinese from the Sanscrit (the ancient language of Hindostan) so early as the eleventh year of the reign of Wing-ping (Ming-ti), of the Han dynasty—i.e., 69 or 70 A.D. We may therefore safely suppose that the original

work was in circulation in India for some time previous to that date." (Quoted from the Introduction to Beal's *Romantic History of Buddha*.) Thus, as the writer of the article on the Gospels in the *Enc. Bib.* observes, when referring to the parallels: "The proof that the Buddhistic sources are older than the Christian must be regarded as irrefragable."

P. 51, lines 24-5.—*Modern non-Christian beliefs,  
Parallels in the rites of.*

Very similar ceremonies are to be found among the heathen to-day. For instance, something very like our Eucharistical rite is performed in modern Japan. Looking on at a service in a Shinto temple, I was much struck by the extraordinary similarity of the whole ceremony. It was a sort of High Mass with Gregorian music. The blessed wafers are not eaten on the premises, but are taken away by the worshippers to be used in time of sickness. The worshippers, I may mention, were all of the poorer and more ignorant classes.

P. 54, lines 11-12.—*Their blood was drunk in the  
form of wine.*

Regarding this, Grant Allen remarks: "When Dionysus became the annual or biennial vine-god victim, it was inevitable that his worshippers should have seen his resurrection and embodiment in the vine, and should have regarded the wine it yielded as the blood of the god."



P. 64, lines 7-8.—*Adopting the dates of the birth and death [and resurrection] of its Saviours.*

At the winter solstice the sun seemed to the ancients to be commencing its annual journey round the heavens. Accordingly, December 25th was considered to be the sun's birthday, which was annually celebrated by a great festival in many parts of the heathen world—in China, India, Persia, Egypt, and also in ancient Greece, Rome, Germany, Scandinavia, Great Britain, Ireland, and America. Similarly, at the vernal equinox, the sun, which has been below the equator, suddenly appears to rise above it, and so, usually upon a date calculated by the pagan astronomers (and corresponding roughly to our Easter), we find that throughout a considerable portion of the ancient world, after mourning the sun's death (sometimes for a period of three days), the Resurrection was celebrated with great rejoicings. Primitive man regarded all sensible objects as instinct with a conscious life. He noted the changes of days and years, and the objects which so changed were to him as living things. The rising and setting sun, the return of summer and winter, became a drama in which the actors were his friends or enemies. It was no allegory, but, strange as it appears to us now, all an absolute reality.

Christ's birth was ultimately placed at the winter solstice, the birthday of the sun-god in the most popular cults; and, while that is fixed as an anniversary, the date of the Crucifixion is made to vary from year to year in order to conform to the astronomical principle on which the Jews, following the

sun-worshippers, had fixed their Passover. This ignorance of the early Church concerning the dates of the birth, death, and "resurrection" of Jesus, is an exceedingly suspicious circumstance. If the fundamental verities were an objective fact to the early Christians, how *could* the dates have been so utterly forgotten that dates belonging to idolatrous superstitions had to be adopted? It is perplexing enough that God should have allowed the memory of His Son's life on earth to be handed down for a considerable time by tradition only: but that He should have permitted such lapses of memory and the substitution of the dates of pagan festivals is to me altogether inconceivable. It could not but raise suspicion concerning His revelation in future thinking generations. We have a certain knowledge of the dates of comparatively unimportant events in the world's history, ages before the Christian era. If these important dates could be forgotten, what else may not have been forgotten; what else may not have been substituted in the place of forgotten incidents? Again, did not the disciples and their converts celebrate the anniversaries of these great events? And, if so, on what dates? The question is of more importance than perhaps at first sight it appears to be. The public will one day be asking the Church for a satisfactory explanation, and she must be prepared to furnish it.

P. 68, lines 9-11.—*The sun . . . was the phenomenon they worshipped.*

The worship of the sun was natural enough before science revealed what the sun was and what it was

not, what it did and what it did not do.<sup>1</sup> Even in the animal world we find gestures of adoration of the sun strongly resembling a sort of sun ritual. Speaking of the Kima monkeys in *My African Neighbours*, Hans Goudenhove tells us how they collect every evening on the tops of the largest boulders and in chorus call out their farewell to the setting sun. He continues: "There is something touching in this cult of the sun practised by many animals [the meercat and the mongoose are other striking instances]—the origin, perhaps, of men's worship of the fixed star." In an interesting article on this subject appearing in the *American Mercury*, March, 1932, the writer, Jacques Malan, explains how he was so struck by the barking of baboons at sunrise and sunset that he made a further study of the phenomenon. He came to the conclusion that "the odds seem to be that certain fixed reactions to the sun are firmly rooted in animal behaviour by the time human consciousness emerges, and that sun-worship is merely an elaboration of a tendency already vaguely formulated in animal consciousness."

P. 70, lines 23-4.—*A substratum of truth.*

On pages 47-54 of *Modern Knowledge and Old Beliefs* I have called attention to a valuable little work which deals with this subject entitled *Jesus Christ: An Historical Outline*, by the late F. C. Burkitt, Professor of Divinity at Cambridge from 1905 till his death, 1935. Another recent and instructive work is *Jesus—The Man* (C. W. Daniel,

<sup>1</sup> The Mexicans quite naturally named the sun Ipalnemohuani, "He by whom men live."

935; 2s. 6d.), by the Unitarian Minister of Cape Town, the Rev. Ramsden Balmforth, where, of course, the doctrine of the deity of Jesus disappears.

How little is left of the cardinal doctrines of the Christian belief, when founded upon a substratum of truth alone, is forcefully brought home to one by the study of such works as these. The whole question has been gone into by me at considerable length in Chapter IV of *Modern Knowledge and Old Beliefs*, where the writings of Bishop Barnes, Dean [lately retired] Inge, Canon Streeter, and other modern churchmen are commented upon. Another work, this time by an out-and-out modernist, recently published, is *What to Believe* (Simpkin Marshall, 1936; 7s. 6d.) by the Rev. J. C. Hardwick, Vicar of Partington, Cheshire, and formerly Chaplain and Tutor of Ripon Hall, Oxford. Here hardly a doctrine survives, while the value of prayer lies only in its auto-suggestive properties. I have complained of the want of complete candour by many writers on religion. The Vicar of Partington is one of the exceptions which prove the rule.

P. 80, lines 20-22.—*A Mithraist could turn to the Christian worship and find his main rites unimpaired.*

We have the witness of the Christian Fathers. Justin Martyr, after describing the institution of the Lord's Supper (1 *Apol.*, chap. 66), goes on to say: "Which the wicked devils have imitated in the mysteries of Mithra, commanding the same thing to be done. For that bread and a cup of water are

placed with certain incantations in the mystic rites of the one who is being initiated, you either know or can learn." Tertullian intimates that "the devil, by the mysteries of his idols, imitates even the main parts of the divine mysteries. He also baptises his worshippers in water, and makes them believe that this purifies them of their crimes. There Mithra sets his mark on the forehead of his soldiers; he celebrates the oblation of bread; he offers an image of the resurrection, and presents at once the crown and sword; he limits his chief priest to a single marriage; he even has his virgins and his ascetics (*continentes*)."

(*Præscr.* c. 40. Cp. *De Bapt.* c. 5.; *De Corona*, c. 15. Quoted on p. 322 of J. M. Robertson's *Pagan Christs*, 1st ed.) We have also the witness of modern discoveries. For example, Professor Franz Cumont, in his work, *Les Mystères de Mithra*, gives a photograph of a recently-discovered bas-relief, representing a Mithraic communion. On a small tripod is the bread, in the form of wafers, *each marked with a cross*. Whatever may be thought of the argument from Mithraism, it is a fact—comparative religion reveals it—that doctrines almost identical with those of the Christian belief were prevalent, ages before the Christian era, in various parts of the world, including the eastern Mediterranean basin, where Christianity evolved. For example: inspired by a belief as much in magic as in a god, the doctrines were commonly current that the partaking of his flesh and blood would be beneficial, while his sacrifice, himself to himself, in atonement for the sins of man, was a *sine qua non*.

# THE CHURCHES AND MODERN THOUGHT

By  
VIVIAN PHELIPS.

## SOME APPRECIATIONS

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"It would be well, indeed, if every student in all the theological colleges in Christendom could have a copy of this book placed in his hands, if only on the principle that he who knows only his own side knows little of that."—REV. RAMSDEN BALMFORTH, in the *Cape Times*.

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